OTHER WORLDS

SCIENCE STORIES

February, 1956

35¢

DAUGHTER OF DOOM

By HAL ANNAS

★

The **PHANTOM MILKMAN**

By JACK VANCE

★

The **STRANGEST MAN IN THE UNIVERSE**

By CHARLES L. FONTENAY

★

The **IMMORTALITY OF PROFESSOR BICKERSTAFFE**

By T. P. CARAVAN

★

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....Editorial....

IF you've never read OTHER WORLDS before, you deserve an explanation. If you don't know Ray Palmer, the editor (and publisher), you most certainly deserve an explanation! And if you are an old friend, we've just got to talk to you! All of which adds up to a mighty difficult editorial.

This is perhaps the only magazine being published, even in other fields than science fiction, where the editor has a name, and even more, has a nickname. Perhaps more people call me "Rap" than Ray. Nobody ever says "Mr. Palmer"! Heaven forbid! You see, I'm not on the other side of the fence; I'm on your side! I publish and edit (and write a lot of) OTHER WORLDS because I'm almost obsessed with science fiction. It's a love I've had since 1917, when I first read Tarzan in ARGOSY. A guy named Forrest J. Ackerman is called "Mr. Science Fiction" and Fan No. 1; but darned if I'm not "Crazy Fan No. 1"! Simply nuts about it. And all these years I've been in with the gang, informal as can be, and prone to say what I think (split infinitives included). Haven't got much education and usually lie about what I've got. But I do have experience— in science fiction, and an assortment of really odd things (such as flying saucers, underground races of idiots, the latest edition of Jesse James, etc.) And it all adds up to the kind of an education that a guy chooses, rather than is forced to take.

I've made my mark on science fiction, beginning with my original stories, and as editor of the granddaddy of them all, AMAZING STORIES; but OTHER WORLDS is a *culmination*. It's the end result of a lifetime hobby, the desire to create my own brand of science fiction, to be part of the literature-history that will be recorded as a phase of the whole of human literature— and not an unimportant one. In short, OTHER WORLDS is "Rap."

Now, maybe a lot of people would rather not have such a personality angle included. They are the ones who will find "Rap" intruding into what they would otherwise accept without kicks— and so they kick: "Keep your nose out of the magazine; who cares about *you!* It's the stories we want to read, not your incessant ravings." Well, that's true enough. But we have a belief about writing, and that is no story is a story unless it is about *people*, and it's even better if it's *by* people! What is there that can make a story interesting, if it's not the *human* interest? I can't have such a belief, and stay tucked away in the anonymity of "The Editor." No, I sign my editorials "Rap"; and I write them from my own noggin, not from a textbook. You'll never see an editorial by me titled "The Electronics of Space Travel." Jumpin' Jupiter, no! By what right does a non-electronic-engineer like me presume to copy out of the current "Electronics & Engineering" and spill a lot of dull statistics and call it an "editorial"?

Editors, by tradition, are emotionless, faceless effigies in the background. They are stuffed shirts, pompous and superior beings, giving the masses the precious treasure of their superior mentality. Or they are politicians, using literature to grind their own axes (like William Randolph Hearst). Or they are cautious individuals who never make a statement in print lest somebody challenge it— so they parrot only the "authority." Aw, hell! I'm the kind of a guy who, when a reader visits him in his office, says: "Come on, let's get out of this bear trap and go down for a cup of coffee!" We-

've had many thousands of cups of coffee on AMAZING STORIES' time! And while we chewed the rag over the coffee, our grammer ain't been so good! But we cured a lot of readers of saying "Mr." in an awed voice.

What are we getting at by this introduction? Okay, it's this: We're trying to do two big things, and all of a sudden they are tremendously important to us—we're trying (1) to *change* what science fiction has become (which we don't like), to something that will excite us once again, and our readers too, like it seems to us it should. And (2) we're embarking on a campaign that looks like the toughest we've ever tried; we're trying to revive the ghost of Edgar Rice Burroughs and cause a successor to be named, to carry on the wonderful characters and stories he created, into new adventures. We want to perpetuate a continual flow of these stories, because we feel that they would be the most wonderful force for good and for happiness and pleasure for children the world over (even 45-year-old children like ourselves), and supplant, in a measure, the obnoxious literature today being circulated among our youngsters and among our not-so-youngsters. Maybe we're moralizing here, trying to be a reformer, and if we are, maybe it's not such a bad thing. At least, if that's how it's interpreted, we're not ashamed of it.

I've got a son, age five, who will be, in two years, where his daddy was in 1917. We'd like him to be able to pick up a magazine that will thrill him to his toes, and continue to thrill him for the rest of his life, and influence it for good. We hate to think of him picking up a magazine like "Confidential," and becoming the rotten thing that that magazine is. (Suppose we'll be sued now!—and if so, let's repeat it—that magazine is *rotten*. It stinks. It is immoral beyond immorality. It is a festering sore on the great body of literature.) Instead of featuring people who have honor, loyalty, love, bravery, integrity, purity, honesty, dependability; can laugh, cry, and use their emotions honestly; they feature all the rotten things that the human cesspool can possibly contain. I want my son to read about *good* people not rotten people—especially when those rotten people are being glamorized, made "popular," and held up for *imitation*.

Tarzan and John Carter of Mars are wonderful people— the kind I want my son to imitate, read about, learn to love, and to make his vicarious companions. And so, I'm crusading now for a new writer to be appointed to write more adventures of these two, and all the others of the wonderful troupe created by the greatest literate benefactor the world has ever known. To do it, I must have a wave of public demand that will overwhelm all objections. To do it, I need every person who ever heard of Rap to write in, saying they'll back the plan to "Name A Successor To Burroughs", and then, when the signal is given, deluge the Burroughs interests with thousands of letters.

I've asked my readers to write me, suggesting that they enclose a dime to cover the cost of placing them on a list so that I can notify them when and where to write, and what to say. I'm going to keep on asking, until I have those many thousands of backers! So, just as I did in the November issue of OTHER WORLDS, I'm asking all who would like to see this done, to join my "Dimes for Tarzan" campaign, and to do it now.

The first novel has been written; I've read it, and it is terrific. 100,000 words of sheer ecstacy (to me, at least—and I consider myself a Burroughs fan of the most fantastic type, from the very first day Tarzan saw the light.)

They brought back Sherlock Holmes. Let's bring back Tarzan! And all his friends!

Now a few words about OTHER WORLDS. First, we did increase the

(*Continued on page 71*)

DAUGHTER of DOOM

BOOK II

RECKONING FROM ETERNITY

By

HAL ANNAS

ALETA: Novakkan prisoner whose decision to join her captors barred her forever from her native planet, Earth.

RAHN BUSKNER: Novakkan giant who captured Aleta, and then won her heart; who has sworn to avenge her though he must fight his way across a galaxy to do so.

MOXOL: The Relentless Avenger, son of Aleta and Rahn, whose determination to rescue his mother is second only to that of his father.

ALINE: daughter of Aleta and Nyuk, neither Earthling nor Novakkan, torn between her desire to aid in saving her mother and the overpowering need to return to the Eg planet and solve the many mysteries of her background, birth and heritage.

CHAPTER ONE

ALINE was seventeen when the SYZ patrol ship come down on Unor just outside the Environs du David. Half its compartments were sealed and what was left of its crew were more dead than alive.

There was no mistaking what had happened. Photonic blasts had raked it from nose to tubes.

Those of the crew who could talk told a wild story of a running fight with raiders which began just inside the spacelane and continued outward for weeks.

Raiders!

The word echoed all around Aline, made her slender body quiver.

The only father she had ever known was a raider. Rahn Buskner. He was not her real father. At puberty, when she learned the role her sex played in life, she had listened to her mother tell of a handsome redbearded prince who had ruled a planet between two far-off suns. The story held her interest, and as it was elaborated she grasped why she differed so from her half-brother Moxol.

From as far back as she could remember the bulking green-tinged Novakkan, Rahn Buskner, had preferred Moxol, but had treated her kindly and brought her wonderful gifts from far corners of the galaxy.

He had built the big rambling fortresslike Castle du David where she and Moxol had grown up. Her mother, Aleta, had named the castle for a kinsman in the Solar System, and reigned

virtually as a queen.

Rahn Buskner was the only father she knew. And Moxol was her brother. They were both in space, had been gone longer than usual. They might have encountered the SYZ patrol.

The injured being brought out of the patrol ship and placed on the rolling lawns du David were, she knew, implacable enemies of Rahn Buskner.

Doctors came from surrounding villages, and as Aline, following the example set by her tall, stately, blonde mother, helped with the ministering, she was compelled to listen to tales of the weeks of fighting repeated over and over.

The dread thought came: "If it was so terrible, what must've happened to Rahn Buskner and Moxol?"

And then she became aware of a growing fear among the golden-skinned Unorian servants. The raiders brought wealth to the planet. The natives knew the iron rule of Rahn Buskner and feared to aid his enemies.

But for Aleta, Aline knew, the Unorians would let the injured die.

And then, as she steadied a half-smiling young Earthman while the burns in his back and side were cleansed, she turned away from his humorous dark eyes and looked at her mother.

Her mother's hands were trembling.

Long ago she had got the impression that nothing short of a holocaust could disturb Aleta. She had taken it calmly when Moxol first went to space with his father, at the age of twelve. After the ships had vanished Aline heard something like sobbing, but found her mother dry-eyed.

The Unorians often got excited, but not Aleta.

But now—

It was minutes before Aline understood what was happening. As she watched she saw a Unorian doctor slink out of sight behind shrubbery. Even then it wasn't clear. Not until darkness came did she realize that none but the oldest family servants were still on the ground.

More than two hundred injured were sprawled on the lawns. Many of them would die. And still inside the ship, in sealed compartments, were dead that should be brought out and buried.

Aleta, she noticed, was hurrying in something like desperation. The full import had not yet dawned. She wanted a word with Aleta to make it clear, but couldn't pause at the moment when dying men were begging for water.

The walking cases helped, but most were so exhausted they could hardly move. It seemed impossible that they had been able to keep their ship under control sufficiently to bring it down without crashing.

After midnight Aleta called, "You must rest."

"But there's so much to be done," Aline said. "We can't leave these men to die."

A tall Earthman, with a broken arm and minor burns, touched her shoulder. "You're an angel," he said. "No one could've done more. Don't exhaust yourself. We'll need you again after you've rested."

She had a brief word with her mother. "I can understand why the Unorians should be afraid," she whispered, "but not enough to go off and leave men to die."

"Aline," Aleta said, voice unsteady, "I'd hoped you'd never see the things I've seen. Try to understand about Earthmen and Novakkans. If your father's ships come down while these men are here—"

She left the sentence hanging, went on working, and it was sometime before the full meaning dawned.

Far back in the dim past a single planet in the Lexn System had been set aside for Earth's exiles. Some properties in the planet caused the exiles to grow to gigantic proportions, seven and eight feet tall. Their skin took on a greenish tinge; their hair became white, their eyes ruby red. Their strength and recklessness and enterprise increased with their bulk, and they took over the entire system and called it Novakka.

A new language grew, a mixture of all languages.

Warlike, intractable, they turned their energies outward and for centuries had plundered the spaceways and planets.

The SYZ System was colonized by Earthmen. A score of years in the past, Earth reckoning, the colonies and Earth had fought a terrible war. The Novakkans took advantage of it to increase their raiding. They became known as the scourge of the universe.

Earth and the colonies settled their differences in order to deal with the

Novakkans. They had never completed that task, but had hammered the Lexn System so hard and long that the raiders scattered to outlying systems.

Into this ferment Aline and Moxol had been born. Their mother, Aleta, was an Earthwoman captured by Novakkans. Rahn Buskner had held her against rivals and efforts of the Earth fleet to rescue her.

But Aline had been conceived earlier. She had heard vague stories of her father. Where he originated, and exactly what blood flowed in her veins comprised a mystery that kept her restless and discontent. She meant one day to unravel it.

As she thought of these things she got a clearer insight into the fear that had come to Unor. She even understood some of the things her mother had sought so hard to keep from her.

And, mentally, she rebelled.

It didn't seem right for ancient hatreds to be carried on down through the ages, to pass from generation to generation. It didn't seem right for Novakkans and Earthmen constantly to fight.

There was nothing so horrible about the clean-limbed young man beyond her window, sprawled on the lawn, gazing up at the stars. Their skin was of fine texture and pale like hers, like her mother's. They were little taller than she, soft-spoken, considerate, graceful in their movements.

And they were brave.

They had to be to face Novakkans such as Rahn Buskner, who had coursed the galaxy from end to end and fought every type of living creature that would give battle.

She couldn't sleep. Stars were bright and the purple lawns rolled away to the velvet horizon. The scent of the night, the shadows, the whispering breeze evoked fancies. She slipped out of bed and climbed the circular stairs to the tower.

Faint murmurings from the injured still reached her, but she closed her ears and studied the heavens. It took a moment to find the star she wanted, for it was remote. It took still longer to find the faint red spark beside it. But her mother had shown her.

The bright yellow star and the red dwarf gave life to the Eg System. It was unique. Not even Rahn Buskner had ever spoken of another system with two suns. Seven planets revolved around a dead star and drew warmth from a star on either side of their orbits.

Her mother had speculated that some special quality could be found in the Eg System. She had even experienced something there that led her to believe the planets were sentient. The part that was difficult to believe was that it had occurred inside solid substance.

Aline could not doubt her mother. The two of them had something in common lacking to others It was a sensitivity to the mood of surroundings, and she believed that it was more highly developed in her than her mother. At times, it seemed, she could tell what people were thinking, how they felt and what they would do in given circumstances.

She stood as if hypnotized, trying to picture her father, and wondering if she was different from all other life in this galaxy.

Her slender body suddenly grew rigid. The soft night breeze pressed her translucent weblike sleeping garment close against her flesh, outlining each seductive curve and hollow. Starlight painted her cheeks amber and turned her auburn hair to spun copper.

A tremor ran through her.

Controlling herself by force of will, she turned slowly, lifted a slender hand to her mouth.

It was the tall Earthman with the broken arm. Starlight fell full on his features. They were strong, even, marked by strain and suffering. His nostrils were distended, breathing deep. His dark eyes were photographing every line and rill of her features and figure.

"I'm sorry," he said, voice deep. "I came up here to get a glimpse of the countryside by night." He gestured. "It reminds me of Earth. I was born there."

Cheeks flushed, Aline was acutely conscious of her sleeping garment. She moved to go by him.

"Please," he said, closing his one good hand on her arm. "I've been in space for months. You can't imagine how hungry we get just to see a woman, to hear a feminine voice."

He was wrong. She knew exactly how he felt. She had felt that way more or less all her life. At times it seemed that she was living among aliens. She felt sorry for him. She had never been more deeply moved to comfort anyone. She had never wanted more to listen to a deep, soft-toned voice.

Moving into the shadow, she lowered herself to a cushioned seat. He sat beside her. He talked of Delos in the SYZ System, with its cobalt hills and frequent visits by comets. He talked of Earth with its vast industries and robot machines which functioned as servants. He told how it was ringed with space stations which served as forts, talked on of its commerce with nearby planets, with the Eg System, and how it was reaching out to colonize innumerable systems toward Andromeda.

And then suddenly she discovered that she was talking, pressing close against him, telling of her dreams, of her loneliness, of her hope someday to find her own father's people, others like her, others who could understand, who could share thoughts and dreams with her on that planet or planets that had sentient life.

His arm came about her, held her close and warm. The gentle breeze stirred her hair. Faint starlight filtered down just beyond the shadow. Her white garment looked like mist; she could feel the warmth from his hard muscular body through it.

His voice was husky: "You don't belong out here. You should be on Earth or Delos where your beauty would be appreciated.

He drew her closer. She made no resistance. And when his lips came down on hers it was as if she had suddenly come alive.

He lifted her to her feet. "I've got to think this out," he said. "Someway I have to figure out how to take you back with me."

CHAPTER TWO

THE day was very bright. She had hardly slept but never felt better. Her shoulders still tingled where he had held her, her body still glowed with the warmth that had grown between them.

He had told her things she'd never heard before. He had made her see through his eyes, and suddenly she had known that she had come to a crucial point in her life and that nothing would ever again be the same.

His name was Chris Darby and his parents and other kin still lived on Earth. He had gone to the SYZ System at eighteen and enlisted in the patrol because of the high pay. He was twenty-two and had spent most of three years in space.

As he talked, she shared every moment with him, suddenly found herself feeling toward his kin exactly as he did, disliking ship officers that he disliked, admiring the commander that he admired.

It was a wholly new experience, and as she went on helping the injured she wondered how she would get the news to her mother and whether she would take it as calmly as she had taken Moxol's first venture into space. For she was going back with him, if not on the patrol ship, then with him when he returned for her.

Her mother slept late. When she finally rose she summoned the commander. What transpired during their talk remained a mystery, but Aline noticed that the tempo of getting the dead out of the

ship increased. They were buried in *shallow* graves, and engineers worked feverishly to make repairs on the ship.

The day passed serenely enough for her, but the fear that had come to the planet remained. She couldn't smother it entirely, and it increased when some of the officers rounded up Unorians and compelled them to work under the muzzles of rayguns.

That was when her mother sent a message of caution to the commander. She heard the words herself: "Have your officers exercise extreme care. Should they harm a Unorian your entire crew will be in danger of Novakkan vengeance."

Aline had heard the expression. It had never stirred her deeply. But her mother could hardly utter the words without going pale.

Whether the commander regarded the warning seriously was another question, but it was certain that he drove his own men to the breaking point. He sent them out to forage for fresh food, for materials that were needed, for herbs and minerals for medicinal uses, and he took what he wanted from the villages and offered in payment only Earth notes and SYZ script, both worthless out here.

Her mother, Aline knew, kept a close watch on the planetary visual when she was inside the castle. Helping with the injured, she glanced up frequently and sometimes studied the sky for long minutes. The ship officers did the same and reports from the ship's instrument room were made to the commander, wherever he was, at regular intervals.

There was feverish haste on every hand.

Aline was aware of it, but she moved in a sort of glow, an aura of well being, that denied that anything in the universe could go wrong. She was looking forward to the evening, and then the hour came.

The night was like silvery magic. It was filled with dreams and stardust. She had never been closer to any man, never understood one better, never found herself so perfectly in accord with any other. She had found the solitary one for whom she could make any sacrifice, for whom she could give up home and even the dream of going in search of her own father's people.

With her head on his shoulder, his uninjured arm about her, they were sitting quietly on the cushioned seat in the tower, talking softly of things as far removed from fear and danger as the remotest star, when the ship's audio sounded "All hands!"

He rose as if stabbed, tightened his belt, loosened his raygun. For a moment she thought he was going to plunge down the steps without a word, but he turned back, drew her to him one more time, and then was gone.

As she followed down the stairs more slowly and paused in the vast high-ceilinged hall she heard a faint cry from the music room. It was unmistakably the voice of her mother and it meant someone had gone in and left the door open.

She hurried to the room, halted in the doorway. The acoustics amplified each sound and the voices were loud and threatening: "Give your word that you will not send out a warning and we will release you."

Ringed by seven men, three of them officers, her mother stood in indignant silence. Her hands and shoulders trembled; her features expressed anguish, anxiety.

Beyond her the visual brought in a clear picture from space. On it was a ship drifting in without power. The markings were not clear enough for reading, but Aline had no doubt that it was one of Rahn Buskner's.

One of the officers stepped to the wall, drew the drapes, and pressed a stud. As it was intended to do on bright days, the polarity of the crystal changed and it became transparent. Beyond were the lawns where the injured had lain, and beyond them the SYZ patrol ship. Lawns and men and ship out there were bathed

in soft starlight.

One man stood staring at the castle, awaiting a signal. Others were hastily moving about the ship, crowding through its airlocks.

"What," Aline's mother demanded heatedly, "are you going to do?"

"If you will send that ship away—"

The officer never finished the sentence. A second ship appeared on the visual, a tiny dot. It was using power which meant that it was far out. It may have appeared larger on the ship's instruments. The makings may even have been clear.

At any rate, at that moment a great ball of light leaped away from the grounded SYZ ship.

Aleta screamed. Aline likewise.

"Fools!" Aleta stormed. "You can't fight Novakkans with a crippled ship."

But the damage had been done. As they watched they saw the ball of light shrink to a pinpoint and then burst. The first ship seemed to vanish. The other went into full power. At thirty degrees, it had already begun maneuvering before the explosion had reached its full extent.

As the screen cleared they saw that the first ship had broken in half. It had suffered a direct hit. The other was plummeting toward the horizon.

Again a ball of light leaped outward. They watched it shrink and vanish. The ship dropped below the horizon and was lost to view.

Other dots appeared on the screen, quickly vanished.

The officers looked at one another. "What now?" one said.

A greybearded man said, "I think we have sealed our doom.'

The others prodded him for more information.

"We're sitting," he went on. "The Novakkans use what they call the Infinio Curl for sitting ships. They caught us on Syber when we outnumbered them ten to one and not a ship got off. They drop below the horizon, go completely around the planet, calculate the range and zero-in all their batteries. Then they bob above the horizon just long enough to empty everything they've got—and down again. They repeat it over and over, swinging back and forth underneath the planet."

"I warned you," Aleta said.

But what troubled Aline was not the strategy of the Infinio Curl. In those last seconds, before the explosion, her sharp young eyes had seen something the others may have missed. She was almost certain the markings on the ship that had broken in two were those that Moxol wore on his armor.

For a moment her blue eyes filled with mist, then she put the thought aside and clutched at her mother's arm.

"We must do something," she said. "We mustn't let Rahn Buskner kill these men."

"Rahn Buskner!"

"Rahn Buskner!"

"Rahn Buskner!"

The three officers repeated the dread name with something like awe in their voices. They looked from one to another. They studied Aline and Aleta. One pointed significantly.

"That must be the notorious Winrow girl," he said. "Wanted on Earth for treason. She vanished eighteen years ago."

Aleta's scorn was bitter.

"And this could be her daughter. She was with child at the time."

Aline shrank back, confused emotions torturing her.

"It all ties in," another said. "Rahn Buskner. Aleta Winrow. So we've finally found their hideout. This may solve our problem. Hostages."

The thought failed to move Aline other than to a sense of outrage. But it was apparent that Aleta was frightened.

"Do you realize," Aleta said earnestly, "Rahn Buskner would burn the surface of this planet, and us with it, rather than let you take us?"

"She's right," the greybeard said. "You youngsters haven't fought Novakkans as long as I. We were fools to fire on their ships. More fools to think of molesting their women. We might have got off with ransoms."

The officer in command lifted his chin. "We represent Earth and its colonies," he said. "The whole Earth fleet is behind us. If we allow Novakkans to dominate our actions we are no better than this traitor." He pointed at Aleta.

"Having the Earth fleet behind us," the graybeard reminded him, "didn't keep our forces from being cut in two in the spacelane. And may I repeat that we're sitting and enemy ships are going into the Infinio Curl. We'd better strike our flag and talk terms if we can get them."

"This is a matter for the commanding officer. Take these women out to the ship."

Aline and her mother were herded out to the ship. She didn't see Chris Darby, but saw men working frantically, clearing out debris and making preparations for launching. They waited in the corridor until the commander admitted them to the chartroom.

He listened patiently to the officers, then said, "The idea of taking hostages is unthinkable. We are civilized men, not barbarians. But if there is sufficient evidence to indicate the older woman is or has been a traitor, our course is clear. We must deliver her to proper authorities."

The greybeard stepped forward impatiently. "If we scatter across the countryside," he said, "some of us may live. We don't have much time."

"He's alluding to a typical Novakkan maneuver," another explained. "He expects the Novakkan ships to bob above the horizon with all guns blazing."

The intercom crackled into life: "Ships just out of range on three sides. Appear to be reconnoitering. Our instruments indicate they are heavily armed with both atomics and photonics. The debris of the ship we hit is still falling. Two lifeships put out from it. Engineers report will be ready for launching within hour."

"Stand by," the commander ordered, then: "Check the files and if this woman is a traitor detain her. Remove the other one. Clear for action."

CHAPTER THREE

THE next hour was a nightmare to Aline. Repairs had not been completed on the ship and the corridors were littered. Men moved in confusion, working desperately. Only the older officers seemed undisturbed and their actions seemed governed by a set of regulations.

Her mother was led to another room. She followed. Somebody tried to separate them, to press her along to the airlock and outside, but other orders came and she was forgotten.

It was apparent that the men were striving to get the ship aloft. To them it meant survival. Nothing made them feel more helpless than to be sitting with raiders swarming about them.

Aleta grew more bitter. "Fools!" she said scornfully. "To think they can get off the planet with Rahn Buskner out there!"

They could only wait.

An officer nervously switched on a visual. On it they could see images of the activities outside. Most of the debris had been cleared away. The last man was moved inside the ship, the airlocks closed.

The ship shuddered as the engineers tested their reactors. Bells rang. Orders crackled over the intercom.

Outside, the night was pale with starlight, quiet, peaceful. No sound came from the castle, from the surrounding villages. But Aline knew that behind each portal Unorians shivered.

The ship shuddered, lurched. The final test checked. The order sounded, "Take her up."

On the visual Aline saw tiny radiant

dots. They were far away, so far that the ship's gunnery officers were not interested. The thought brought tears to her eyes. Rahn Buskner was, after all, letting them take her and her mother. Only one thought softened the sense of loss that came with the tremoring belief that she might never again see Castle du David and the scenes of her childhood where she had spent so many happy hours with Moxol and Unorian children. The thought that cast a glow of unreality over everything else was the knowledge that Chris Darby was on this ship.

The gravity shifted. The ship labored to lift itself from the planet, to begin the long climb out of its grip.

The castle began receding.

And then on the visual she saw something bob above the horizon. It was there for a moment only, and in that moment it glowed as a nova. Far off to the left the same thing was repeated, and again to the right.

The ship rocked, bounced, seemed to swap ends. Light flashed all around it, blotted out the view on the visual.

A still heavier jolt followed. She was thrown from her feet, dazed. And then the shaking stopped.

Voices roared in her ears. "Zero forward batteries. Clear the damage below. Stand by your guns."

"Fools!" Aleta repeated. "They never learn."

"What happened?" Aline asked.

"These Earthling fools are trying to get a crippled ship off the planet with Rahn Buskner's raiders out there?"

"Will they destroy the ship?"

"Not if they can avoid it. Novakkans destroy ships only when they can't capture. This one is sitting on their own planet."

"I thought it had got off."

"It tried, got started, then the raiders smashed its tubes. They could've burned it to a cinder, but the fool Earthlings won't believe it."

The visual no longer worked. Aline lost sight of what was happening on the horizon, but when she glanced out a port she saw, in golden starlight, something that made her heart leap into her throat. It was the tall figures, the colorful skirts, the white hair of Novakkans. They were swarming toward both ship and castle, spreading across the grounds.

Voices sounded in the corridors. Men moved wildly, aimlessly. Somebody passed on the information that the guns had been knocked out. Nothing but hand weapons remained.

Then it dawned over Aline that Chris Darby was somewhere in that mob of confusion and that his life was in danger.

She started toward the corridor, but her mother's hand closed on her shoulder, flung her back.

"The killing will begin in just a moment," her mother hissed. "Stay back."

Pale and quivering, Aline asked, "What does it mean?"

"The raiders are coming in. They're ripping the locks apart now. Stay back. In a corner. Under a table. Anywhere."

Aline was held helpless behind her mother. She was astonished at the strength in the older woman's hands and body. Her actions and decisions were positive like a man's. Aline got the impression that if danger entered here her mother would fight as grimly as any man.

Something of this determination entered her own soul. She had no intention of cowering behind her mother while the raiders killed Chris. And this, she gathered, was what was going to happen.

The Novakkans would come in killing. Her mother had made that clear. And she herself had always been a little terrified in their presence.

Crashing and tearing sounds grated through the ship, then shrieks. And finally came the stench of burned flesh.

Wrenching herself free, Aline plunged toward the doorway. She saw a tangle of men, arms upraised, long knives des-

cending. Towering above them, their green-tinged features horrible in their blood lust, were the Novakkans.

Something struck her on the head The floor seemed to come up to meet her. Dimly she heard a feminine scream, was aware of a tangle of legs, of shaking and thundering and cursing, and the sickening smell of blood.

And then it all turned into a dream and she lay in her own bed. Her head and body ached. She tried to turn, discovered that she was bruised all over.

Voices sounded nearby. One of them belonged to Rahn Buskner.

"Search every inch of the planet," he said. "Use every float. Don't stop until you can bring me Moxol or his body."

A softer voice said "Torturing the prisoners won't bring Moxol back. Without water they'll die staked out under the sun. Order your men to lock them in the storage rooms."

The meaning was not clear, but Aline was aware that it was daylight, high noon. Memory cleared slowly. Then it all came back, and without another thought for her bruises she leaped out of bed.

It was some moments before she could get into garments and into the big high-ceilinged hall. There she was seized by her mother who, though showing strain, was again calm and in command of the situation.

"Don't go out," Aleta ordered, "until they've moved those men out of the sun. It can only bring you nightmares."

But Chris Darby was out there somewhere, if he still lived. She had no intention of sparing herself while he suffered. She snatched away from her mother, ran to the court and on out to the lawns.

The lawns were green and lush. Hardly a sign of their recent occupancy by injured remained. Nothing was in sight to give her qualms.

But atop a distant rise Novakkans squatted. They were Rahn Buskner's men. She had seen them hundreds of times. Their own dwellings were in the villages and about the countryside. She had always been just a little afraid of them, but never shown it. She had no intention of doing so now.

Hurrying, she continued on to the rise. As she approached she heard groans. Her knees trembled. She drove herself on. The Novakkans twisted, stared idly, made no other move.

At the top of the rise her heart stopped beating.

Staked to the ground, their faces to the burning sun, were scores of naked Earthmen. Their bodies were already beet red. Their tongues hung out. They begged for water.

Half-choking, nearly blind with tears, Aline ran down among them. No one moved to stop her. And when she thought she would faint, when she thought she could not move her trembling legs another step, she saw him. Chris Darby.

His broken arm was twisted into a grotesque position and shackled. The unhealed burns on his body were open and running. He had fresh wounds and his fine strong features looked as if they had been clubbed again and again.

Dropping beside him with a sob, she made an effort to cover his body with hers, to protect it from the pitiless sun. He groaned, then recognized her, begged her to go away.

Ignoring his pleas, she tore off her skirt and placed it over him. She cast about desperately for something with which to break the shackle.

Somebody croaked hoarsely, "Water."

The word acted as a spur. While Novakkan eyes followed her, she ran, almost nude, to the castle, on back through the servants' quarters, and didn't stop until she found a plastic container that would hold gallons.

With water sloshing out of the container, she again ran, stumbling, to the rise and down among the Earthmen. She never stopped for breath until she reached Chris Darby.

The cries and groans about her suddenly quieted, and when she looked up she saw Rahn Buskner and her mother.

Her mother said, "She can't bear suffering. You'll have to move these men into the storage rooms before she becomes demented."

Rahn Buskner growled an order and Novakkans came hurrying.

Aline watched the shackles removed from Chris Darby's limbs and neck. She helped him to his feet. She supported him as he tottered back toward the castle. She shrieked to servants to bring her medicants, and she attended his injuries while the storage rooms were being opened and cleared.

At just what moment she became conscious of her nudity, and his, she hardly knew. It may have been as his eyes cleared and strength flowed back into his body.

Aware that the eyes of other Earthmen, being prodded back to the castle, were on her, she squeezed Darby's good hand one more time and ran inside and to her own rooms.

Her undergarments were stained with blood and watery fluid from burns. She skinned out of them and entered the great marble pool in the sun room. But she didn't dally.

In fresh clothes she hurried to the grounds. The prisoners were no longer there. They had been herded into the storage rooms, she knew.

The storage rooms were an acre of subterranean vaults. On Earth they would've been called dungeons when put to their present use.

She went down the winding stone steps into the shadowy dimness, met Novakkans coming up. They eyed her unemotionally, said nothing, made no move to stop her.

Though they knew she was not a Novakkan, they had long ago accepted her as Rahn Buskner's daughter, as Moxol's sister. No one dared interfere with Rahn Buskner's movements. So also Moxol, even when he was a child. And so now Aline. No Novakkan, under Rahn Buskner's command, would dare order her to stay out of the lower corridors.

In semi-darkness she found the big plastic door, the slot through which food could be passed. She called Chris Darby.

They talked. He assured her that he was all right and begged her not to take any further risks.

"But," he said, "if you can, without endangering yourself, find out what is to be done with us."

She reached a hand in to him, felt his lips touch first the back, then the palm.

"I'll find out," she promised. "And somehow I'll get you out of this."

CHAPTER FOUR

"WHAT," she asked her mother in her private chamber "will Rahn Buskner do with those men?"

Her mother's voice was low and tense: "If he doesn't find Moxol, I'm afraid to even think of what will happen." She pressed a handkerchief to her eyes. "Reports are coming in every hour. They've found one wrecked lifeship. There were no survivors."

Aline realized suddenly that she hadn't given much thought to her half-brother. Things had happened so fast and there was so much confusion around her that other things seemed of less import. The thought that Moxol might be dead sent a chill through her.

In childhood they had been close. When she was nearly fourteen, and he was twelve, he had gone with his father into space. She didn't think of it then as a raid.

She remembered how she had looked forward to his return and to listening to the tales he would tell of planets of strange color and beauties and music that would make you dream.

But when he returned he had changed, grown older. Even her mother stopped treating him as a child. From then on the childhood camaraderie that had been theirs was gone. He was strangely quiet, reserved, thoughtful.

He would never be as big as his giant of a father. At sixteen he was little more than six feet tall, slim, finely molded. Unlike the true Novakkan's, his hair was yellow, eyes reddish brown, and his skin olive in hue.

Aline had once heard her mother say, proudly, "He's quick as an Earthman, shrewd as an Eg, and fearless as a Novakkan.

His strength was abnormal for his size. Aline had seen him wrestle with hard-bitten raiders fourteen inches taller, who outweighed him by more than a hundred pounds. Some could master him at fifteen. She doubted if many could now. That is, if he was still alive.

Except for some chance remark, such as "That box we were in under Arcadia was the hottest——" he never spoke of his adventures. Nor did he make himself prominent at the feasts when the ships returned from long months of raiding as was his due, being the son of Rahn Buskner. He sat quietly and sometimes walked off alone.

In her own newfound knowledge of the ways of men and women, Aline wondered if he had fallen in love with some sultry olive-skinned princess whose palace he had spared because of her beauty. She wondered if, on his raiding jaunts, he passed close to that imaginary planet and held the Novakkans in check from the rich spoils because he had marked a special treasure there for himself.

These fanciful thoughts helped her to bear the uncertainty. But they didn't erase the anguish of the knowledge that Chris Darby was imprisoned beneath her feet.

Few Novakkans remained on the grounds. Rahn Buskner had taken charge of the search for Moxol and was away. She could come and go as she pleased, and she carried many fine things to eat to the storage rooms.

Earthlings crowded round the slot and she had little opportunity to talk with Darby alone. Others were not so solicitous about her endangering herself and suggested over and over again that she try to get them out.

The thought had occurred to her, but it devolved solely around Darby. She would take any risk for him, and at the first opportunity she whispered a message.

"My mother has keys to every room in the castle," she said. "Rahn Buskner is often away for months. When he goes away I'll get the keys and let you out."

Darby shook his head sadly. "He'll dispose of us someway before then."

She talked with her mother, but didn't mention keys. "Do you think he would release one of those men for me?"

Aleta looked at her long and anxiously. Tears came into her eyes. "I know you've been lonely," she said. "You've never known young men of your own race. You're as naive in such matters as a child. I'll have to send you to school on Earth. I can arrange it through someone in the Eg System. Don't think any more about those men down there. If Moxol isn't found soon they will all die horribly."

The thought sickened her. She made up her mind to free Chris Darby herself.

In the morning she rose early and dressed quietly. She waited until she heard her mother enter the sun room and lower herself into the pool. She hurried to the private chamber and began the search. It was not rewarded and she escaped with barely seconds to spare.

Later she entered Rahn Buskner's chamber, found the cabinet in which he kept special trophies and charts of gravity fields in space, but could not get it opened. She had no doubt that keys,

or the secrets of opening doors in the castle, were there.

Still later she cornered an aged Unorian woman servant and asked her to tell of the days when the castle was building. The story rambled and she had to bring her back to the point time and again.

Finally she said, "But didn't they build secret passages? How would they escape if the castle was surrounded by enemies?"

The woman chuckled. "You have a fanciful imagination. Surround Rahn Buskner! Everyone on this planet is his friend. But there were some secrets. Your mother insisted on one. Have you ever noticed the gray circle under the stairs to the tower?"

Aline had, but thought that it was part of the stone.

"At this season," the woman went on, "it is directly in line with a star that rises between ten and midnight. The starlight comes through the vent opposite. When it strikes that circle all the secrets of the castle are revealed. Now listen close. That star is the one under which your mother was born. It is called Sol."

In trembling eagerness Aline hurried to the tower, crept under the stairs. The years had made no difference in the circle. It was simply a gray mark in the stone.

Disappointed, she went to the vast cosmograph room. It took her quite a while to locate Sol, and even then it wasn't impressive. But a faint tingling ran through her. Chris Darby had also been born under that star.

Loading her arms with edibles, she went to the storage rooms, called. He came quickly, but there was little animation in his voice. The thought that he was becoming discouraged tore at her heart. She told him of the circle and the star and tried to put enthusiasm and conviction in her voice.

"I'm sure I'll find a way to get you out," she said.

The commander came forward. "We trust you implicity, Miss Du David," he said. "Whatever the outcome, you shall be exonerated of guilt in connection with piracy or treason."

She didn't understand, thought that perhaps the strain had become too much for him. She was glad when he went away and left her with Chris Darby.

They talked on until she heard footsteps in the corridor. Six Unorians came down bringing food. They bowed to her, spoke softly, made room for her to pass. She returned to her rooms, brooded for a time, then went in search of her mother.

Aleta was dressed in black. "I'm about to give up hope," she said.

Aline knew she was alluding to Moxol. The lines of grief in her strong blonde features were mute evidence of her love for Rahn Buskner's son.

"How would you get into the storage rooms if Rahn Buskner wasn't here?" she asked.

Aleta eyed her with interest. "I'd rather you'd forget about those men," she said. "You're torturing yourself with thoughts of their misery. You can't help them that way. But if you must know, I have a set of keys locked away; Rahn Buskner has another." She hesitated "The doors can also be opened by rays. The idea was a whim of mine when we built the castle. It was to remind me of something on an Eg planet."

The thought set her afire with interest. She begged her mother to tell of those days before she came to Unor with Rahn Buskner.

"It's too frightening," Aleta said. "Especially after your father died." She paused. "He was slim, graceful and quick like an Earthman. But he wasn't an Earthman. He did something no lone Earthman has ever done. He stood off Novakkan raiders. And he fought Novakkans alone hand-to-hand and lived to fight again."

The story always interested Aline, but

something else was more important at the moment. She wanted to know what it was that had provoked her mother to have secret ray-locks built into the castle. She said so bluntly.

"There was a snow mesa," Aleta went on. "It's hard to believe, but we actually moved from one planet to another in seconds and without a ship. We arrived on the snow mesa. It was bitterly cold. We had to find and break beams to get into warmth."

It was incoherent. Aline wondered if the strain had also been too much for her mother. That sensitivity to moods, so long theirs together, was strangely missing. She got the impression that her mother didn't actually believe what she was saying, or felt that it sounded so improbable that others couldn't accept it, and so failed to put conviction in the telling.

"You broke beams? What kind of beams? Like those in ships?"

"Yes." Aleta nodded "I've forgotten how many and how they were arranged, but if I were there now I know I would remember. Anyway, I can find out between ten and midnight tonight. Shall I show you?"

Aline was not certain whether she wanted her mother to show her. It might not be best for anyone to know what she was going to do But she urged her to talk on and in the following hours she learned about the Eg planets, things unbelievable, but which she was beginning to believe. Her retentive mind clung to the knowledge.

At ten o'clock she was under the stairs in the tower. The gray circle wasn't visible in the darkness But a few minutes later it glowed crimson.

In fascination she watched the color change to amber and then the purest yellow. From the vent opposite a triangular beam of silver slanted down, touched a point just below the circle. It wasn't this that held her attention. It was a perfectly round golden beam. It was coming directly through the wall, exactly filling the circle.

The stone seemed to have turned to crystal. She leaned forward and looked directly into the beam. She was almost blinded. It was a golden ball of fire, and then she understood that she was looking directly at Sol, its light magnified innumerable times She had never been more deeply impressed.

Turning back to the circle, she saw that it had taken on depth. It was crisscrossed with yellow streaks on the surface, but the effect was of looking into an infinite depth. Shadows moved in that depth and took on substance and shape. It seemed that life was there.

And in every changing pattern one single design was constant. It was a crimson streak to the right, and then to the left three dusky, almost invisible, silvery streaks.

She rose to her feet, drew a deep breath. The sensitivity to moods had returned. She felt that she was attuned to the energy field of the castle. No secret, however dark, could it withhold from her. She had touched those things, out of the past, of which her mother had spoken.

They made her feel uneasy, fearful. She could almost forget the men below, even Chris Darby, in the knowledge that something had come to her that hadn't come to other mortals. It gave her a sense of unlimited power. At the same time it terrified her.

Trembling, shaken to the core, she clung to thoughts of Chris Darby. Nothing else, she realized, could hold her steady and unswerving in her purpose to free him. She smothered all other thoughts, determined not to clutch again at the power that was there for the taking.

The crimson beam and the silvery beams were identical with the design on the big chest in her mother's reading room. Quietly she went there, experimented. By touching the design with her palms and waiting until warmth had

soaked into it, she found she could unlock the chest.

Inside were hundreds of keys of every size and shape. They were all inscribed and indexed. Some were magnetic keys. Others were of combinations of substance that would move a bolt only when they came in contact with their reciprocal inside the lock.

She took out two keys, closed the chest and allowed it to lock of itself.

CHAPTER FIVE

CREEPING down the cold stone stairs, she experienced indescribable fears. She wanted to turn and run back up the steps and to her mother's rooms. But thoughts of Chris Darby drew her on. She couldn't leave the man she loved locked in a dungeon.

At the heavy door she stood in darkness and called his name through the opening in a loud whisper. Stirrings sounded inside. Someone said, "Darby, wake up. Your angel is outside." There were further sounds of movement and then he stood at the door. In the darkness she could barely see his eyes.

"Here," she said, thrusting her hand through the opening. "The big one opens this door. The other opens the servants' supply and implement room just along this corridor. You'll find clothes there. I'll wait for you in the tower."

She was about to hurry away when she heard the voice of the commander. "Miss Du David, you've performed a noble service for Earth and its colonies. Someday you shall be welcomed by the Council of Councils and receive a fitting award. Your deed shall not go unnoticed."

The words didn't evoke the response intended. They made her even more uneasy. She was trembling when she tore herself away and ran up the steps.

Darby was not long in coming. He too, seemed disturbed. In Unorian clothes too small for him, he was not the dashing figure he had been in his SYZ uniform.

He said, "I received specific orders from the commander himself to come to you and thank you again. I was even ordered to remain with you until I hear a signal. It's to be the hissing and clacking such as the carnivorous plants on Delos make when they've captured prey."

"But you must hurry," she warned. "Get away from the castle. Hide somewhere. Rahn Buskner may return at any hour. When he goes to space come back in the night. Someway we'll plan how to leave the planet together."

In his presence she was still uneasy, fearful. But when his arm came about her nothing else seemed to matter. She lost herself in the ecstasy of the moment, and time fled.

"I can't understand why the signal doesn't come," he said.

Fearful, she, too, was impatient. But she knew that it would take time for the others to get out of the storage rooms and clothed.

Losing herself in the warmth and glow of his presence, she ignored other things and began to feel again that nothing could be wrong anywhere.

"It's time for the signal," he said. "We'd better go down."

Hand-in-hand they crept down the steps, paused in the unlighted big hall. Then she drew him along the side corridor toward her rooms.

"You can drop to the ground from the balcony," she whispered.

They stood by the open windows, waiting, listening. Still the signal didn't come.

He moved about nervously. To divert him, she switched on the visual.

"Moxol," it said, "has been found."

A tingling ran from her head to the tips of her toes. It semed that everything in the universe had suddenly become right again. It might not be too difficult now to persuade Rahn Buskner to give Chris Darby freedom on this planet. She flung herself into his arms, clung. And she felt that she would never be afraid

again.

At that moment a terrifying hissing and clacking sounded.

Again he kissed her, then stepped to the balcony and dropped silently into the night. She stood there watching, saw him move as a shadow, vanish. She turned back to the visual, and the terrible thought came that Moxol might be dead.

But the view reassured her. It showed Moxol very much alive; and it was explained that the lifeship in which he and twenty-eight others escaped the doomed raider, had crashed into a crater overgrown with an almost impenetrable jungle.

Of the twenty-nine, one died from injuries received when the ship was hit. Another was crushed to death in the crater by a huge reptile which Moxol subsequently killed.

The survivors had not exactly been found. They hacked and cut their way out of the crater and were making their way to the castle when they encountered search parties.

Aline ran to her mother's rooms. Rarely had she been happier, and she felt that her mother would be mad with joy.

The rooms were quiet. In the bedroom the windows were open, the curtains blowing. The canopy was drawn on the bed and the bed was empty.

For a long moment she stood unmoving. Then her eardrums were assaulted by a terrific roaring. She sprang to the window.

The grounds were lighted as by the noonday sun. Long plumes of flame reached down from the sky. At the top of the flame a battle-scarred raider was laboring upward, beginning the long climb out of the grip of the planet.

As she stood numb, watching, she couldn't put her thoughts in order. But finally the truth forced itself on her. The freed prisoners had taken a ship. Chris Darby was on his way back to the SYZ System.

With confused emotions racing through her body, she went back to her rooms. It didn't matter, she felt, what he did or was doing, but he should have told her, should've taken her with him.

And then the second shock came. Her mother. The words of the commander. It all fell into place.

In frantic haste, she roused servants, searched the castle from tower to scullery. Her mother was not there. At last she dropped on her bed and wept.

Rahn Buskner found her there. He was in a fearful humor. A ship had gone to space without his orders. Aleta was missing. It seemed that he would take the castle apart stone by stone, but by daylight he had accepted what had happened and begun to make plans.

Every grounded ship had been damaged. It would take days for repairs. In the meantime Novakkans swarmed about the grounds, fuming at the thought of being tied to a planet.

The vast communication room was opened, the atomic powerplants put into operation, and for the first time in Aline's knowledge Rahn Buskner broke long-range communication silence.

She heard it said that as much power was used in the broadcasts as was used to drive a hundred ships to Arcadia. It would reach out to the Eg System and might even be picked up in SYZ. But he sent only one message over and over.

"Blue scrolo . . . Blue scrolo . . . Blue scrolo . . ."

It went on hour after hour. And after it had begun going out, Rahn Buskner ignored it and gave his attention to repairing the ships. Unorians were driven in from far reaches and compelled to work until they dropped. Novakkans stood over them with guns and knives, and scores died.

This was the state of affairs when Moxol returned.

He came in limping and accepted Aline's nervous embrace with reserve. He looked older, full-grown, but less like a Novakkan than he had. He took the

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news quietly. Indeed, he had heard the gist of it long before he reached the castle.

Aline gestured toward the communication room. "What does it mean?" she said. She felt, now that her mother was gone, that he was the only one on the planet with whom she could talk, who could understand, who might have a spark of feeling left for her.

He shook his head. "I don't like it anymore than you, but it had to come. The galaxy is growing smaller."

"But what does it mean?"

He sought words with which to make it clear. "Novakkan vengeance," he said. "Rahn Buskner is sending out word to the scattered raiders to bring them together."

"But what does it mean?"

He studied her eyes, his own olive features showing the strain. "In your lifetime and mine the Novakkans have been scattered. They settled on remote planets, as we have, built bases far apart, made hit and run raids. Some may even have taken up other callings. But Novakkans are restless, warlike. It's in their blood. All they've needed at any time was a single call such as is going out now. They will gather. Far back, when they abandoned the Lexn System, they made a pact, mapped plans, and each knows where he is to rendezvous in space. The plans have been handed down from father to son, to cousins, to brothers and sisters. They have come to me. It means that the hour has come when Novakkans have decided that the galaxy is not large enough for both them and Earthmen."

The thought left Aline without feeling of any kind. She went about in a half-daze, not caring. She would've felt better, she believed, if Rahn Buskner had blamed her for the loss of the ship and her mother. But she got the impression that he had wanted an excuse to send out the call that might spell doom to intelligent life in the Milky Way.

He ignored her, and when the ships

were repaired he dispatched them, one by one, to the Arkl System, to Minox, to Arcadia, Zekn, Wekell, Udveden, Xosk, Nickton, Septo, Luxvor, Andam, and to remote Xnor, Singuel, Arto, Sedwo, Lubre, Nocto, and others.

Three ships remained on the planet; these, and her mother's cruiser which hadn't been to space in Aline's memory. He brought it out of a roofed crevice in the hills, where it had rested in memory of something important to Aleta, and had it groomed. He had the SYZ ship rebuilt and inscribed with ovals and dots, symbolizing a planetary system or an atom, in the familiar Novakkan raider markings.

"I still don't understand," Aline told Moxol. "He's killing Unorians by the scores, driving them day and night. It won't be safe on this planet when you go to space again."

Moxol shrugged. "No life will be on this planet long," he said. "The spaceways must know the raiders are gathering. And there are those who will reach the SYZ from here. They'll have this planet located. It will take a hammering very shortly. You'll be sent far out."

"But I shan't. I'm going to the Eg System. And you're going to take me."

She hadn't spoken to Moxol in that tone since he was twelve. Before that they had been chums, playmates, and it didn't matter how she talked. Now he was a raider, though much different from any Novakkan she had ever known. She didn't expect him to agree. It was not the Novakkan way to let a woman make the decision in matters of danger.

But he said, "You might be safe in the Eg System for a while. It's certain that we'll strike the outer planets and cut the spaceways at the beginning. I've been in space with my father four years. I know his strategy. He'll send a small force toward SYZ, to draw out the fleet, and then scorch a continent or two of the home planet, Earth. He'll seize a foothold there and commit what are called depredations while he draws off most of his forces. And as the fleet comes rushing back to the rescue he'll strike the SYZ System in full force. He may completely denude those planets. Success there will enable him to ring Earth and harass it, smothering its commerce, until the populace is exhausted."

Aline had never heard Moxol talk that way before. He didn't sound like a Novakkan. They were not noted for elaborate plans. She gathered that he was talking of plans as he would execute them in Rahn Buskner's place.

And then it dawned that here was a Novakkan, half-Earthman, that had both the courage and the will to carry out such plans. He was not an ordinary raider. Sixteen years old. Little more than six feet tall. By Earth gravity, less than two hundred pounds in weight.

He didn't bluster, didn't boast. He didn't move heedlessly. He had an element of caution and foresight in his system lacking to most Novakkans.

It suddenly occurred to her that Chris Darby, however remote from Unor, might one day die at the hands of her own brother.

CHAPTER SIX

She was given three days to make ready for departure. There was so much to be done she couldn't have accomplished it all in a month.

She wanted to hold a big feast, to say goodbye to her thousands of Unorian friends, but those that were not driven there to work wouldn't come near the castle.

Her three days of preparation were cut to two. Moxol told her that patrol ships were moving out from the spacelane in force and that their objective was Unor.

She became as eager as the others to get off the planet. She felt that the populace would be spared if the Earthmen found the planet abandoned by the Novakkans.

The cruiser was comfortable, but its Novakkan crewmen were surly until Moxol came aboard in space. It followed the first ship up. The repaired SYZ ship came next. They stood there in the empty reaches waiting for Rahn Buskner to complete some task on the planet.

As she moved from port to visicom and back, Aline fought to control the surging in her throat. The planet was a great blue sphere with a circle of white at each pole. Its features were not clear from the port, but on the visicom she could make out the villages, the hills and the sprawling castle where she had played and studied and grown and finally met Chris Darby.

A picture of him was there in her mind as she thought of her mother and the things she had taught her. And suddenly she was blinded with tears. He should've told her what he and his commander were going to do, she felt. He should've known that her love was big enough to be trusted until the end of time. He should've given her a chance to show him that her mother couldn't possibly be guilty of treason.

The talk on the SYZ ship the night the Earthmen tried to escape had been vague and confusing. It was of things that happened years ago on an Eg planet. They'd said her mother had sent word to Earth Council of ships grouped behind a dead star. The information misled the Earth fleet, and raiders, striking suddenly, captured the reparation settlement and almost caused the war between Earth and SYZ to flare anew.

In the confusion they hadn't given her mother a chance to explain.

She dried her tears, for Moxol was crossing from the raider to take charge of the cruiser. Rahn Buskner's ship came off the planet like a bolt and the four ships went into full power and continued until they reached the energy field under Arcadia. There they rendezvoused with more ships than she had dreamed existed.

"We've come billions of miles," she breathed in Moxol's presence, "but on the cosmograph we've hardly moved. We seem no closer to the Eg System than when we started."

"Think of everything moving at high velocity in space as moving in waves like light," he said. On graph paper he drew something like a coil, then varied it with wavy lines back and forth. He stabbed a marker at the top of the paper, again at the bottom. "The distance from here to there," he explained, "is the sum of the distance round and around that coil, or back and forth along those waves. To cross a relative distance in space you have to travel miles." He folded the paper and punched a hole through it. "The secret," he added, "is in finding an energy field and plunging directly through. And Novakkans in their endless roaming have charted more energy fields than Earth will record in another hundred years."

He tapped the cosmograph. "In less than three weeks we'll be standing between the Twins and Kazor. Just beyond is another energy field that will bring us out off the SYZ and Eg System spacelane

In the following weeks Aline spent much of her time studying astrography and the operation of the cruiser. She was encouraged by Moxol who told her they would soon be parted, possibly for years.

With Moxol aboard, the Novakkans were less distant and showed her amazing things that could be done with the cruiser if it got in a fight, but explained that it wasn't heavily enough armed to face patrol ships or Earth cruisers.

She gathered that it was to be left with her and that she was to be left on an Eg planet after all resistance was subdued.

But the plan was not carried out. They reached the Twins and Kazor, rendezvoused with more ships, then Rahn Buskner divided the forces, sending some two hundred raiders out toward the edge of the galaxy to learn what Earth had

accomplished in the way of colonizing in the direction of Andromeda.

She was apparently forgotten. Moxol was called back to a raider and then to the main force which was to push on toward the spacelane. Her Novakkan crewmen fumed. They didn't want to be aboard the cruiser when the fighting began.

At the last minute a message came ordering the cruiser to join the main force. But it was already bottled up in the midst of those plunging into the energy field, outward bound, and couldn't turn back immediately.

When it returned to the Twins and Kazor the main force had vanished, and Patrol ships that had lain in hiding as the Novakkans passed came out to investigate.

The Novakkan crewmen forgot their surliness and fought. The cruiser was no match for the heavily armed patrol, but managed to escape between the twin planets, and make a run for Septo. Inside the system, the Novakkans played hide and seek among the planets and again escaped by plunging so close to the star that the patrol ships dared not follow.

Parts of the cruiser melted and Aline thought she would burn to death, but the Novakkans seemed not to mind the heat. She gathered that their greenish skin protected them in some way others were not protected. They packed her in ice which quickly melted, then clothed her in a spacesuit and sealed her in a vacuum chamber.

When they emerged beyond the star she had dehydrated nearly a fourth of her normal weight and was so weak she couldn't stand for more than a few minutes at a time.

The patrol picked them up again two days out of Arkl and the nightmare began all over. It seemed impossible that they could escape, but the resources of the Novakkans had not been exhausted. They found a meteor belt among the planets, led the patrol ships directly into it where two of them were destroyed and the others delayed. Again they fled, cutting back toward Wekell and the energy field between it and Andam.

Just off Wekell a small group of Novakkan ships appeared. They had come from far out and were on their way to rendezvous with Rahn Buskner. They made short work of the patrol.

Surliness returned aboard the cruiser. The Novakkans hated the light ship that had to run rather than fight. Quarrels broke out among them and one was killed. The others talked of dropping down on a planet and taking their anger out on the undefended populace.

Aline was rapidly recovering her strength. At this point she buckled on a raygun and a long slender blade that had belonged to her mother and marched into their presence.

"I am the daughter of Rahn Buskner," she said. "From now on you will obey my orders." She was astonished to note that her voice sounded much like Moxol's.

The Novakkans made no reply, but their quarreling subsided, and the cruiser entered the energy field with the raiders.

Off the spacelane they rendezvoused with a large force ringing energy fields through which any Earth reinforcements from the direction of Andromeda would have to come. The main force had already cut the spaceway and driven a wedge between SYZ and the Eg $_{4}$ System. They were subduing resistance on the Eg planets and at the same time reaching toward SYZ with the object of drawing out the Earth fleet.

It seemed unreal. Aline had been seventeen when the crippled patrol ship dropped down on Unor. She had never seen so many injured men.

Now she was eighteen. She had lived as much in the past few months as she had in her entire life before. She had witnessed fighting in space and narrowly escaped death herself. But those things were insignificant, she felt. Whole planets

were being overrun. Hundreds of star liners had been destroyed or captured. Thousands upon thousands of people, much like herself, were being killed or subdued.

And this was just the beginning. They were reaching toward SYZ and the planet Delos, about which Chris Darby had told her so many meaningful things. She tried not to think of it, for anything that reminded her of Chris Darby gave her a sense of trembling helplessness

And as each hour flowed inexorably into eternity more Novakkan ships arrived, some from the very fringes of the galaxy, to swell the vengeful might of Rahn Buskner. It seemed that nothing could stop him.

The crew of the cruiser was changed. Eight men from a system she'd never heard of, or seen on a cosmograph, came aboard. Their skin was lighter, their hair silvery, and their eyes reddish brown like Moxol's. They were not giants like the typical Novakkan. The tallest of them was well under seven feet.

Nor did they wear the colorful skirts and broad belts of the Novakkan fighting man. Their close-fitting jackets and trousers looked like metal.

But their language was the same, a mixture of all languages.

Their leader's name was Acra-non. Under questioning he admitted they were not true Novakkans. They were the sons of men originally inhabiting the planet Denovo, who, though now scattered, had developed a culture of their own. He was reticent about telling why they had answered the Novakkan call, but finally admitted the legend of the pact had come down to them.

They asked many questions about Rahn Buskner and, as if to draw her out, repeated superstitious tales that he was immortal. They questioned her about her relationship, seemed surprised when they learned she was his daughter by adoption only. They treated her with deference and made no complaint about armament of the cruiser.

They addressed her as Reeal-den and it was not until later that she learned what it meant. They used the term *reeal* to describe the red after glow of a photonic blast. She asked Acra-non bluntly what *den* meant. He shook his head, but finally translated it as spirit plus power.

It became clear then and it made her smile. In the way they used it, Reeal-den meant Crimson Goddess.

They were capable of handling the cruiser well, as they demonstrated, but seemed more interested in keeping it in good repair, and when it drifted too close to a battle-scarred raider, and the raider's hard-bitten commander, in a fuming rage at not being with the main force and in the midst of the fighting, demanded to know by what right a toy ship wore Novakkan markings in their midst, they manned the guns and ordered him to apologize to the Crimson Goddess or get blown out of the cosmos.

The exchange attracted attention and visicoms crackled with the information that the cruiser carried Rahn Buskner's daughter. The raider, its commander still fuming, withdrew, and the Denovians treated Aline with even greater respect.

At times they were strangely naive, too innocent appearing, and Aline began to suspect that they had a purpose not wholly in keeping with Novakkan vengeance.

When orders came to proceed to the Eg System they placed the cruiser in the forefront of the armada, ignoring advice to the contrary, and warned flankers to keep their distance. They were so audacious that Aline feared for their lives. Novakkans were not accustomed to honoring anything but force. Giving place to a cruiser that couldn't deliver a broadside that would more than blacken the skin of a raider was new to them.

Trouble might've developed then and there had not a task force of the SYZ fleet come out of the energy field It appeared behind them and struck with

startling suddenness.

Aline learned of it when Acra-non appeared and informed her, "Part of our forces are engaged." He led her to the chartroom and pointed out on the cosmograph where the action was taking place, and explained that other ships in the armada were reversing their line of motion to turn back against the Earthmen.

"Does Reeal-den wish to move in close and witness the effectiveness of her strategy?" he asked with a touch of irony. "Or does she care to conserve her energies for greater things ahead?"

His tone disturbed her and she couldn't read its meaning. Then the realization came that men back there were dying some of them from SYZ, some who may have known Chris Darby. Her hands trembled, and she suddenly remembered how her mother had trembled and gone pale when she mentioned Novakkan vengeance.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SHE ordered Acra-non to ignore the action and proceed toward the Eg System. Her reasoning was forthright. If she approached the scene of action Novakkan ships would ring the cruiser with a protective screen, not because they valued the cruiser or relished the task, but because she was Rahn Buskner's daughter.

She could do nothing back there, but ahead she could begin the search for her father's people and the origin of her blood line. On an Eg planet she might learn her mother's fate, might even find some way to help her.

And she wanted solid ground under her feet again, not the deck of the cruiser. She had been in space, with nothing but men and bristling guns around her, much too long.

Acra-non held the cruiser on course and forty-eight hours later offered his congratulations.

"For what?" she said.

"Reports indicate the enemy behind us was completely annihilated," he explained, "and your armada is again proceeding in your wake with only minor losses." He spoke as if she had planned and directed the battle.

The thought came that he was prying, trying to discover her true feelings, or to learn whether she had a secret means of communicating with Moxol or Rahn Buskner. She studied his features, his deep reddish brown eyes, the humorous lines around his full mouth. He seemed innocent enough.

As they drew near the Eg System she became restless. With the green-tinged giants as crewmen, in their flight from the Patrol, she'd been too excited to think about herself. Now she was tired of being alone. Thoughts of Chris Darby, her mother, Unor and Delos recurred too often.

Just before mealtime she dressed in a colorful Novakkan thigh-length skirt, buckled on her blade and photon gun and went along the corridor to the wardroom.

Acra-non sat just inside the doorway. His metallic-looking jacket lay at his feet. He was staring at it with fixed intensity

As she watched, the jacket moved. It rose on its tail, balancing with its arms, climbed his legs and sat on his lap.

As she held her breath, he lifted the jacket to the table, leaned back. Again it moved, crept to, the edge of the table and leaped to his lap.

"It's alive!" she breathed.

He came to his feet like a spring, stood at attention, and as if knowing he was not properly dressed to receive her, the jacket squirmed up his body and waited for him to put his arms into the sleeves. No fastener was visible, but it closed itself in front and hung neatly as if standing inspection.

"It's alive," she repeated.

Acra-non nodded. "But of course

Reeal-den knows there is no such thing as totally inanimate matter."

She went on into the room, gave him permission to be seated, told him he must dine with her, and prodded him to have his jacket repeat its performance. Instead, he brought out his blade, reversed it and passed it to her. As her fingers began closing around the haft, it suddenly snatched away flashed through the air and was back in his hand.

"My apologies and the apologies of my symbiosis," he said, patting the blade gently. He passed it again. This time the haft snuggled into her hand, the metal lifted of itself, and she got the impression that she could fight beside the best Novakkan swordsman in the galaxy.

Nor was that all. He showed her that his raygun could be friend or enemy. In her hand, its muzzle twisted to point at her heart until he held it a moment and did something to the metal.

A month ago, she knew, she couldn't have believed such things. She could hardly believe them now. But he made it all seem simple.

"The universe is broad," he said. She noticed that he used the term *universe* rather than *galaxy*. "Somewhere in it is everything possible to imagine."

This was not satisfying. She continued to prod him, and he talked on then and throughout their dinner together. It was not until later that she realized he had hardly touched his food.

After he was gone a dreamy lassitude settled over her. The reality of the ship, her quarters, and the faint vibration from the reactors, seemed to recede. She was not asleep and memory of his talk remained. There was something confusing about it, especially his effort to explain directions of evolutions in inanimate matter.

"Toward intelligence," he had said. "Higher intelligence. Everything, from microbes to planets, evolves in that direction. At the point of awareness of self, conscious evolution occurs and it is possible to bridge across time."

Memory of her experience under the stairs in the tower on Unor shocked her alert. There was some relationship to what she had heard. And then she recalled that her mother had had a similar experience, an impression of life within inanimate substance, on an Eg planet.

His words came back: "There is no such thing as totally inanimate matter."

She leaped to the table, snapped open the intercom and said, "Officer Acra-non. Miss Du David's quarters, please. Without delay."

His features were grave when he appeared in the doorway.

"I must learn," she said. "Tell me, is my cruiser animate?"

He shook his head, beckoned. She followed him to the engine room. There, against the bulkhead, she saw something like the metal of his garments moving back and forth of its own volition. "It's changing the molecular arrangement," he said, then led her on and showed her that the same thing was happening to the light batteries.

He turned and faced her. His features were grave. There was no hint of humor now in the lines about his mouth. "In a few weeks," he said quietly, "the ship they call a toy will be the most deadly in the armada."

She had never been more astonished. She wasn't certain that she wasn't half asleep and dreaming.

And soon she again experienced a dreamy lassitude. Things near at hand seemed to recede. And again memory, connecting the past with the present, brought her alert. Again she had a surging desire to talk with Acra-non, to learn more

He explained that everything, however inanimate, evolved toward life and that life was intelligence. "A tree reaches toward the sun. Intelligence, though restricted. Animals feed on its leaves and roots. Intelligence but now high awareness. Humans make calculated use of ani-

mals. Awareness. All manifestations of the same thing.

"Do you believe," he said, "that a new planet can bring forth metal men?"

She didn't and said so.

"But it can. Many planets have brought forth ships to course the paths of the stars."

"Oh! Through human agency."

He nodded. "But the planet, its star, the space about it, they have produced the ships. From lakes and seas they brought life. Intelligence. It evolved higher and built ships. Who was the mother? Who the father?"

She didn't understand, waited.

"From the planet over eons of time came ships. They can be set on a course which they will alter ten light-years hence to correspond to the migration of stars. They have but a single choice, to follow directions laid down by higher intelligence.

"Man begins his upward climb from the amoeba. He goes in a thousand directions, seemingly has a million choices. But one single law he obeys: evolve. Has he then actually greater choice than the inanimate ship?"

It was becoming difficult, but Aline knew it was leading to a point, and fought off the drowsiness.

"But what does it mean?"

"That intelligence exists in what you call the inanimate. Call it negative intelligence. Your calendar dates from some past moment of time to the present. Assume now a calendar dating from some moment in the future to some negative time in the past. In your positive time life began with flesh. In negative time assume that life began with metal."

He leaned forward, held an oblong between thumb and forefinger and gave it a flip. It spun end over end through the air, made a circuit of the room, returned and settled on his palm.

She gasped. It had been copperish in color when it started. Now it was as white as the blouse she wore.

"In your negative past are the decayed bones of your ancestors; in your positive future the inanimate substance of metal" "

Her hands clasped tight, her body became tense. "Do you mean that the ore from which metal comes is comparable to the bones of my ancestors?" Her heart beat faster. "Are you saying that some form of animation evolves from the future toward the past, and as it dies leaves what we use—" Her mind was in a whirl. She couldn't go on.

His nod was hardly noticeable. "But grasp it as two semi-circles. At the upper reaches of one semi-circle is metal, at the other end is man Both are intelligence, but of opposite polarity. They move toward each other. They are so balanced, each in its orbit, that they pass and go away from each other. They continue into the second semi-circle and again go toward each other. But what happens in that moment when they are passing?"

"You mean, life and the inanimate make a complete cycle in opposite directions?"

"Yes."

"And at that moment of passing—?"

"There is a union, a mating."

For a moment it was beyond grasping, then it came clear. "You mean, they change polarity at that point, and—"

He nodded.

" . . . each develops a better comprehension of the other." It was no longer elusive. She understood, but there was one question: "Where are we now in that cycle?"

He was slow about answering. "Everything indicates we are again approaching at a terrific pace." He tossed the oblong into the air. It divided itself into three parts, again rested on his palm. "But of course Reeal-den knows that some of us are more advanced than others."

The significance was lost to her for a moment. It seemed to carry a threat. It hadn't come clear why he and his followers chose to man the cruiser which was

shunned by the Novakkans. It wasn't clear why he had answered the Novakkan call. Nor was there even a glimmer of why he chose to make the ship they called a toy the most deadly in the armada.

As these things ran through her mind a dreamy lassitude stole over her. She fought it, for underneath was tremoring fear. And then she realized that each time it had grown stronegr, that she could no longer shock herself alert. There were no more memories bridging time between the past and the present. The present was distant but very real. So was the past. The two differed only through some nebulous thing which she could describe only as awareness of now.

"We approach the Eg System," he said a few hours later. "There is still fighting on the outer planets which were heavily garrisoned to protect the spaceways. Shall I order the populace of an inner planet to prepare to receive the Crimson Goddess?"

Such a thought had never occurred to her. She had expected to be received as a visitor. Nothing else.

"Communicate with the flagship," she said. "Moxol must've left instructions."

Soon the cruiser began dropping toward the third planet. As the planet came closer, she saw that half of it was in glacial darkness. The other was lighted in both hemispheres, in one rosy twilight, in the other yellow daylight.

She was fascinated. Here her father had loved her mother and out of that love she had been born.

She turned to the visicom. On it a huge star burned brightly. It was SYZ. And remote beyond it and to the left another. This last was Sol.

She wondered what was happening out there. She wondered if Chris Darby was grimly defending Delos against raiders. She wondered if her mother was standing before her accusers on Earth and answering to the charge of treason.

Blinking to clear her eyes, she turned to the table, snapped open the intercom. "Search the planet for a snow mesa," she ordered. "The planet beneath us."

CHAPTER EIGHT

AS the cruiser dropped toward the misty gray darkness of the mesa she had an uneasy sense of danger. It reminded her of how she felt when she carried the keys down the stone steps to the prisoners on Unor.

Acra-non draped a long metallic-looking cape about her as the airlock opened. The cape was light as tissue, but the moment she stepped out into the snow it pressed warmly against her body and limbs and vibrated slightly.

Acra-non moved ahead toward a black tunnel-like passage. The other Denovians, seven of them, followed in her footsteps. And as she moved she remembered the tales heard from her mother.

It seemed that Acra-non knew what to do but was waiting for her to tell him. The thought stirred a sense of dread. Only the knowledge that her mother had been here, and that the answer to the mystery of her father might be found here, gave her the will to go on.

At the end of the passage Acra-non halted, arms upraised, his garments glowing faintly. How she knew was not precisely clear, but it came with memory of her experience in the tower. And the moment she uttered, "The crimson beam on your right and the three invisible beams on your left," he broke them, as if he had known all along.

And as she stepped through the opening into the purple light of the undermountain chambers she had the eerie feeling that she had been here before.

On along dimly lighted corridors they went until they came back to a blank wall. It was all quite clear, her own mother's words. A cycle would have to pass before they could continue. The panels in the wall opened by rays from the yellow star and the red dwarf.

But Acra-non hestitated not at all. He broke invisible beams, turned back to her. And then, as she waited, a panel slid back, another, and a third.

All doubt vanished from her mind. She was expected. Her mother had made it clear about the three panels. They *could* be opened from the other side. So Acra-Non had, after all, ordered some one to prepare to receive her.

Acra-non stood aside, waited for her to precede him.

Terror came then, a sense of dread she hadn't known before. She turned back in the direction from which she had come. The eight Denovians stood there in a semi-circle, blocking any possible escape.

Concealing her fear, she again faced the opening, and something seemed to draw her forward. She passed through vast, richly furnished, rose-lighted chambers and entered a marble hall as big as the court of Castle du David.

Faint murmurings caused her to halt. They came from every side, grew in volume and became a chant: "Reealden . . . Reeal-den . . . welcome—welcome . . . to Denovo—to Denovo . ."

As she stood in amazement men and women entered the hall from four sides. The men were all dressed in metallic-looking jackets and trousers, but the women wore filmy garments of every shape and design, and as they moved the colors of the garments changed, running the spectrum.

Something about it caused her knees to tremble.

The men resembled Acra-non and his followers, with individual characteristics. The hair of some was almost as white as a Novakkan's. Still others had hair with a metallic sheen. Their features were strong, intelligent, and there was a determined set to their chins.

Most of the women were tall, pale, delicate of features, with platinum blonde hair and eyelashes. Their foreheads were high, with an almost imperceptible slant; their bodies and limbs were shapely, well developed, almost athletic in their curvy slenderness.

The chanting went on. They gathered around her in a circle and a faint mist came from above, changing colors as it descended, bringing an aroma of sweet scented herbs and flowers, intoxicating in its fragrance.

Tremors still ran through her, but now they were overlain with a glowing sense of well being, a sense of withdrawing from harsh reality into a place of comfort and delight.

Memories of the armada and her flight from patrol ships were remote; the killing in process on the nearby planets seemed far away indeed. It was as if Rahn Buskner had never sent out the call, as if Novakkans were still scattered impotently about the galaxy.

Something impelled her to respond, something beyond her, something that seemed to come from an existence outside her body. It was not on an intellectual plane; it was sheer desire to give pleasure, to give back the tremoring ecstasy in her being so that she might experience it to the full. It swept away all resistance, became an uncontrollable urge.

In rhythm with the chanting, she slipped out of the long cape and then her own clothes. The platinum-haired women parted with wisps of their own filmy garments and placed them about her.

The volume of the chanting grew and even the walls seemed to take it up and carry it on in perfect harmony. It filled the big hall, seemed to flow through the flesh, to demand response, to move limbs and bodies in keeping with its time.

As she had danced on the lawns du David as a child, she danced now, her motions not of her willing, but as cellular response to sounds, mood and the pleasure of her senses.

The mist continued coming down in its rainbow of colors. The wisps of gar-

ments the women had draped about her seemed to come alive, to caress her flesh, to flare and flash, to respond to the mood, to send out waves of colorful joy.

Her heart beat faster; her breathing became deep. Her body glowed and a faint moisture appeared on her skin.

Then she realized that she couldn't stop dancing, that something was carrying her along on a lifting rolling, rising wave that would not cease.

At first she had no fear. It had sunk beneath the outer glow, the intoxication of the moment, but then it had returned and with it all the terror she had felt when she faced the open panels

The atmosphere, the walls, the ceiling, the very earth itself, seemed to be alive. In harmony unending, they carried her on, swept her along in a frenzy of syncopated motion, primal in its abandon. And she could not stop.

Every element and energy in the universe had motion. And she expressed it at its elemental level. And she could not stop.

Through the misty fog of colors and incense, the pulsing of the atmosphere and her garments, the wild motions of the strange people around her, her mind clutched at the inner warning that she must break the rhythm, must distort the harmony that made her one with her surroundings, but she could not stop.

The cosmos, it seemed, might fade away. All sense of separate kinship with creatures of her mold might slip back into the primary from which, long ago, it emerged to create species. She might in truth become a spark of elemental energy, a single pulsing heart. of which all things were made, if she did not stop.

These wild thoughts tore at her feverish mind and body, but in no way abated that which had gone beyond her control.

She lost all reckoning of time. Her body moved as a puppet, the strings drawn by timeless law that had neither beginning nor end. She sank deeper into the fog, and her laboring heart and tortured fibres carried her on against her will until total exhaustion came.

The walls receded, advanced; the ceiling rose and fell. The air around her throbbed, and lilting waves of sound pounded her flesh. She sank into shadowy darkness.

And then she began to be awake.

Around her was shadowy twilight, on every side people such as she had seen in the marble hall. She was lying on an expanse of something of cushiony softness.

Acra non came and stood beside her On his features was a look of ineffable sadness. "When the Goddess is ready," he said, "I shall be her escort. She need not be afraid."

But she was afraid. She grasped that something more terrifying than her uncontrollable dance was in store for her.

The women bathed her, brought her food and drink as she had never tasted, and clothed her in rich garments and jewels. Then she was led to the corridor where the men waited.

They formed a procession on either side of her, regal in its splendor, and to the slow beat of music marched into the hall.

It was already jammed to overflowing. She had never seen so many rich jewels, so many varied and colorful costumes. They reminded her of the wealth of spoils when Rahn Buskner and Moxol returned from a raid. But Castle du David was far away, and even thoughts of it were receding.

A broad lane opened for her and her escort. Flower petals fell as she advanced. A sparkling mist, as of points of light, filled the atmosphere.

Into her view appeared what seemed to be a statue of platinum and bronze. Its workmanship was so fine that she paused, caught her breath, stared in hypnotic fascination.

It was the figure of a man of godlike beauty and proportions. It was a trifle over six feet in height, broad, muscular,

and out of its eyes shone a light of unrivaled confidence. She had never seen more intelligent looking features.

As she advanced she saw that it was clothed simply in unornamented golden jacket and trousers. A golden blade hung at its side. In the center of its forehead, hardly noticeable, was a single large ruby. Its hair was as auburn as her own.

She thought that, it breathed.

She paused at the foot of the three steps leading up to it, but Acra-non urged her on, and, holding her breath, she mounted and stood on its left.

Then she was certain she could feel an almost imperceptible warmth from it.

The music ceased. The vast hall was silent. It seemed that not even a breath was drawn. Flower petals had ceased to fall, but the faintly sparkling mist remained, lending an aura of enchantment to the scene before her.

Something touched her arm, sent a tingling through her, and out of the corner of an eye she saw the godlike figure smiling at her, bidding her to be seated.

The touch was firm, muscular, warm, but she couldn't escape the sense of metal. The voice was deep, rich, confident. It welcomed her and again bade her be seated.

Awe in her features, she lowered herself, tried to relax. A firm hand took hers and held it, and she saw that the creature was again facing the assemblage, making a gesture.

The silence was broken. Lilting music sounded softly. Men and women before her joined hands, moved in ceremonial patterns. The whole vast hall came alive with movement, and her sense of awe increased.

The ceremony continued. At some point in it she became aware of the hand that held hers. In its unconscious strength it had closed tighter, taken a grip on her as though it would let nothing part them.

She stirred uneasily, moved her fingers, tried to release her hand. It was as though she strained against metal.

Attracted by her movement, the man turned to her, looked down at her hand. He released it, then gently placed his arm about her. And even in its lightest touch it was compelling. It sent a tingling through her, made her want to press closer. She fought it.

A chanting began, and now it called, "Lon-den and Reeal-den, the new people, the new race . . ."

CHAPTER NINE

AS she was carried from the hall on the shoulders of men, Aline grasped that the ceremonies had in some way joined her to the godlike creature. He had spoken only briefly. His voice was deep, rich, strong.

"Your loveliness is beyond dreams. Do not keep me waiting."

That much she remembered and the import dawned. She was expected to complete physical union with him. It both terrified her and sent a tingling of anticipation through her flesh.

But it couldn't be. Her mind had not accepted the ceremonies as a wedding. She'd never seen him before. Her own wishes had been ignored as if she were property. She knew she would have to escape.

She was carried to a flower-bedecked chamber and a score of women remained to prepare her to receive him.

She recalled listening to her mother tell of her father. "He was a strange man, and I remembered once how his hand felt like metal." The implications were startling. "And there were times," her mother had added, "when I thought he wasn't human, that he was something more."

She wondered then about herself. The impressions she got of moods, of how others felt and thought, as if she could commune with her surroundings, had made her think that she was dif-

ferent, that she had qualities lacking in others.

But she'd been intensely human with Chris Darby. The memory was as fresh as in the hour he had held her. Tears came with the thought, and with the tears the startling fear that she couldn't be entirely human without Chris.

A slender woman came and held her hands. "You understand the honor, don't you?" the woman asked. "And why it was conferred on you?"

Aline didn't.

"Lon-den," she explained, "is from the future, your future. To us he grows younger instead of older. He lives conjointly but in an opposite time stream."

Aline didn't grasp it.

"Something like it must've happened ages in the past, our past," the woman went on. "There are legends of gods. Similar legends are in Lon-den's past, which is our future."

"Is he a god?" Aline asked.

The woman smiled, shook her head. "As mortal as you. But think! You grow older, he grows younger. Your children's children may remain ageless, a balancing of two time streams."

It was beginning to come clear. She was to be the mother of a new race, a race of gods.

At that moment something struck with the violence of an earthquake. Parts of the ceiling came crashing down. Women screamed, clawed at the rubble, tried to help one another. Sounds of grinding and crashing reached her from every side. The walls cracked and split, the floor heaved upward, she sprawled face down, felt stones strike her back.

Then came the voices of men. They expressed pain and fear, but were less panic-stricken. They came closer, and through the dust and red flashes of agony she saw them at the entranceway, tearing the rubble and huge blocks of stone away from the opening.

In the forefront was Lon-den. His golden garments had burst under the pressure of his swelling muscles. She saw him lift a stone that even a Novakkan of Rahn Buskner's proportions might not have moved. He came on toward her, tearing a path with his hands.

Close behind him was Acra-non and two of his followers. Others of the crew were missing, but men she had seen in the hall were there.

She felt herself lifted in powerful arms, and heard other women whimpering as they, too, were helped.

The jolting came again, longer and harder. She felt Lon-den stagger to his knees, force himself up and carry her on to the corridor. As they emerged, the third jolt came. The ceiling of the corridor stretching to the hall came down with a roar that deafened her. Dust and the biting smell of photonic energy stifled her.

And then, as she looked where the ceiling had been, she saw yellow daylight filled with innumerable glowing balls of red. She knew what was happening. She had seen the red afterglow of photonic bursts in space.

And she knew these chambers were deep under the mountain. Nothing but the heavy batteries of raiders or warships could rip a mountain apart.

She was carried along the rubble-strewn passage to the left. Acra-non and others followed, but she noted they were fewer now. Some were buried back there, their cries stilled forever.

What had been a realm of enchantment had become a scene of death and horror.

They entered a room filled with equipment such as she had never seen.

"We can reach the inner planet from here," she heard Acra-non say.

Lon-den stood her on her feet, probed her body with hands that strove to be gentle. She had no broken bones. Except for bruises and shock she was unharmed. Others were not so fortunate. She watched a man set a woman's broken leg while another held her steady. She

saw another, her body crushed, gasp out her last breath.

Lon-den worked with the controls of the equipment, setting up a field that might enable them to escape.

Acra-non switched on a planetary visual. It picked up several channels at once. The earth shuddered, rocked. The visual went dead, then came on again. A redfaced Earthman screamed out at them, "Open channel X-ninety-six. Open channel X-96." Beside him a blase Earthman talked. She understood that they were far apart but both coming in on the visual

"Clear channel X-96," the Earthman screamed. The other went on talking, said, "Elements of our fleet are making a valiant stand against Rahn Buskner's butchers beyond the orbit Pluto. Stations on the moons of Jupiter, Mars, Earth's satellite, the rings of space stations, the reserve ships on the planet, and the ground defenses have been alerted.

"Elsewhere Moxol's murderers are still laying waste the outer planets of SYZ. This is thought to be an effort to draw out our main forces, but the heavier elements of our fleet were earlier reported operating in that vicinity, in coordination with the SYZ fleet, which suffered heavy losses in its premature effort to halt the third armada approaching the Eg System

"The SYZ Patrol, which bore the brunt of the first onslaught against the outer spaceway, was last reported being reorganized under a valiant young officer who, after his commander had been killed in action, took command of his ship and put their own tactics of lateral motion simulataneously with forward motion to use against the Novakkans, and succeeded in fighting his way out of an encirclement. His name is Christopher Darby.

"Efforts to relieve the beseiged garrisons in the Eg System were reported making progress, but the commanders were reticent as to their strategy . . .

"Flash! A report just handed me reads, 'Heavy elements of our fleet are at this hour striking enemy units and installations in the Eg System and making progress.' This may be presumed," the interpretor went on, "to be an effort to relieve pressure on SYZ and the home planet. The move has clearly been made in force. We may anticipate the recapture of the Eg System within seventy-two hours . . .

"A wave of hysteria is still continuing," the man added, "for the release of that regal, haughty woman Aleta, who proudly calls herself Aleta Buskner, nee Winrow, and whose restraint, under a charge of treason, is said to have caused the Novakkans to gather.

"The years have in no way diminished her beauty. She is said to have reigned as a queen on a remote planet. Earlier she sent a warning to the Council, begging to be imprisoned on the moon or a thinly populated planet, so that fewer would die when Rahn Buskner comes for her. She has never once admitted the impossibility of her rescue, despite her knowledge of the might of Earth which stretches halfway to Andromeda.

"In her own words, she said, 'A galaxy may stand between us, but he will come'."

"Clear channel X-96," screamed the other Earthman. "The commander wants orders relayed to our support."

The voice of a third Earthman came in: "Channel X-96 is no more. The relay ship has been lost to the enemy."

Then a roaring Novakkan voice: "We'll relay your message. Supporting units of SYZ Fleet and Patrol, close up. Your commander wants you to fill those holes made by our guns. We have them zeroed in. We ripped the top off a mountain to keep you from bobbing above it, using our own tactics, the Infinio Curl. Close up. We welcome you with ten thousand guns."

The visual went dead. The earth went

on shaking. A hand fell on Aline's shoulder, pressed her toward the equipment. Her mind spun. She couldn't put in order the horrible things she had heard. But gradually they began to fall into place. Chris Darby had been the one who had adopted Novakkan tactics. Units of the Syz Fleet and Patrol were attacking the Eg System. They had used a typical Novakkan maneuver.

Other things seem unrelated, but she knew that somehow they tied in. From what she'd heard, the vast triangle, the corners of which were the Eg System, SYZ and Sol, was aflame with war.

The scent about her began to sparkle, as with stars. She held her breath. She seemed to be falling down inside solid subtance. It went on and on. Some of the other women fainted.

Then there was an overlapping. She seemed to be inside solid matter, and yet still in the same vast, equipment-filled room. It took a moment for her to note the difference. Overhead miniature planetary systems moved precisely as their huge counterparts moved out in the galaxy. On vast cosmographs the action outside was reflected.

The earth still shook. Flashes of white and red came from somewhere. Lifting her eyes, she looked into an infinity of depth. Lon den explained, "It's transparent. This planet is also under attack."

She saw radiant streaks flash overhead, knew they were ships somehow visible here inside the planet. She saw one burst in a blinding flash, saw others careening out of control, sucked inexorably toward the planet and death for their occupants.

The earth overhead erupted. The shock came on down through the ground. Distant walls flew apart.

"The return is geared to planetary motion," Acra-non said, "but if we move now—"

Lon-den nodded, worked with the controls.

A woman gasped. Aline kneeled beside her, suddenly felt bitter cold. The next she knew she was clutched against Londen's body, the shreds of his golden jacket about her. He was running toward a faint blob of radiance. She recognized it as the cruiser.

They had to wait for Acra-non to get the airlock open. Lon-den deposited her inside, then was gone. He returned carrying another woman, again departed. Other men brought in women, some of them badly injured, then hurried out again.

Then she heard the signal that meant the airlock was closing. She stared about in terrified wonder. She went from compartment to compartment, to the control room, the engine room and finally the turrets. Aboard the cruiser were only women, many of them seriously hurt. The men had vanished.

In the darkness beyond the ports photonic energy flashed and flamed, faded to a red glow and vanished from sight. Raddiant streaks passed so fast that ships that made them could not actually be seen.

The whole sky was filled with brilliant flashes.

Vibrations ran ceaselessly through the cruiser. And Aline knew that they were shocks from distant explosions coming through the tortured earth.

Alone, with hysteria all around her, she went to the medical compartment, broke out supplies. She slapped one woman who was clawing at the airlock and screaming for the men not to desert them.

"They haven't deserted us," she flared. "Whatever they're doing is important. Keep quiet and help me with those who need help."

CHAPTER TEN

THE men returned, all but Lon-den. She wanted to ask about him, but held her curiosity in check. As she went on working with the injured, she learned from Acra-non that Moxol had left Delos untouched and turned away from the

SYZ System. Only speculations could be made as to his next objective.

But the weight of probability was that he was deep in space in the wake of the SYZ Fleet and Patrol. The Novakkans hadn't expected an effort to be made so soon to recapture the Eg System. If the Earthmen succeeded here, the third Novakkan armada would be endangered.

That this was an extensive effort was indicated by the fact that the SYZ Fleet and Patrol were supported by heavy elements from the mother planet, Earth.

"The Earthmen have already regained control of the outer planets," Acra-non said. "Their garrisons there were still holding out."

One of the two crewmen came from the chartroom and said, "We'll have to get out of this spot. Not much radiance from the cruiser and as long as the defense of the planet is effective it may go unnoticed here in darkness. But the moment the defense begins to break, and the Earth ships can slow their maneuvering, they'll spot everything that even remotely resembles an armed ship. I needn't tell you what will happen."

Aline had seen gigantic ships, their hulls and armor almost as thick as the cruiser was broad, torn to fragments by a series of hits. Inside the cruiser they would never know what hit them.

"What are we to do?" she said.

"We have to get across the mountain," Acra-non said. "Join force with the Novakkans and hope we can hold out until Moxol comes — if he does come."

The thought left her cold with fear. Acra-non seemed to understand, tried to reassure her. "It may not be so bad," he said. "The Earthmen have a brilliant commander who's using Novakkan tactics effectively, but when Moxol hits him from space—"

The blood drained from her features. "Who is that commander?"

"Darly or Durly. Didn't come clear. Too many channels crossed. But he's got his hands full here, and Moxol is known even on Denovo as a tactician second only to Rahn Buskner. He'll have a surprise for the Earthmen."

To cover up her sudden weakness and trembling, Aline said. "I don't understand about Denovo. You've told me it's a remote planet, but—"

"It is, Its populace scattered. They are the forerunners of the new race. Lon-den's people of the future—"

"Where is he?"

"Leaving a message with his people about what to do if he doesn't survive. But I'll tell you the whole story."

She was blinded by a flash beyond the port. A photonic blast had occurred somewhere on the snow mesa. Seconds later the shock waves rolled over the cruiser, caused it to rock and shake. She didn't see how ships above could fail to locate them now. But Acra-non went on talking as if nothing had happened.

He explained that those of the future had become aware of her mother and father nineteen years ago. It was believed that her father was the son of a man much like Lon-den who had lost communications with his era. Their scientists worked to reach her father and the effort was rewarded, to some extent, when he and her mother were standing off Novakkans on the inner planet. Later her father died and those of the future lost contact.

But they were ready and waiting, and they became aware of Aline herself while she was on Unor. Acra-non gave a date which coincided with her experience under the stairs in the tower.

The future people had learned earlier that they could communicate with the Denovians who were then mystics. The communications were vague, but the Denovians were induced to spread about the galaxy in search of others who were in rapport with the inanimate. They found many scientists who could qualify,

Mexel and his men took objective after objective

but they were hard-headed and overly practical, and they and the mystics failed to cooperate.

Finally Lon-den appeared in the positive stream. At first they accepted him as a god, and wherever he was was Denovo. Thus far, he was the only one from that era who had survived the transfer from one time stream to another; but their scientists had hopes. In the meantime he was searching for a mate with whom to begin the new race.

When they became aware of her, they were certain that Aline had some element of that future in her physical and mental composition.

The Denovians undertook the task of finding her, and Lon-den had aided them with a whole new metallurgical science. Of the thousands who went on the quest, eight succeeded in getting aboard her cruiser. Five of them were now dead.

They had no doubts about her because, in rapport with Lon-den, they detected qualities in her similar to his. And they had somehow known that she would come to the Eg System. There they had prepared to receive her.

As photonic blasts turned the blackness outside to brilliance surpassing the yellow daylight beyond the mountain, Aline stood in silent incomprehension. Acra-non's story had been the most improbable she'd ever heard. And yet it all fell into place. From as far back as she could remember, from the time of the first tales heard from her mother,

something had drawn her toward the Eg System. It had seemed that her destiny was there.

But she still couldn't quite accept it. It didn't seem real until a dreamy lassitude stole over her. Then her interest rose and it seemed that she was in command with not only her surroundings, but the intelligence in that other time stream.

She lost all fear. It no longer mattered whether the Earthmen located the cruiser.

Acra-non buckled a belt about her waist, said, "You will find your weapons lighter now. I've had them since your dance in the hall."

Memory of how she had shed her clothes and danced brought color to her cheeks.

He drew her blade, said, "Open your palm." There was a blurring flash and the haft was in her hand. "This," he said, "is the seat of intelligence." He showed her a metallic-looking spot on the haft.

As she touched it she had to suppress a cry. It felt exactly as Lon-den's hand had felt.

"Hand me your photon gun," he said. "It is likewise attuned to your vibrations."

She passed it to him, and as she watched she saw it snap his hand round to point the muzzle at his own breast. She saw his knuckles whiten as his finger tightened on the trigger. She held her breath.

"I left the safety on," he said. "But take it from me and run your finger along the grip in circular motion." She did so and again passed it to him. It was then just like any other gun.

"It's time for Lon-den," he said. "If he isn't here in another ten minutes we must move anyway."

The thought of leaving the godlike man disturbed her. She remembered how she'd stared at him, thinking him a statue, and the tingling she'd experienced when his arm came about her. She remembered how he'd carried her along that rocking, rubble-strewn corridor, and how tenderly he had cared for her.

And she remembered that the rites of the Denovians had, in their eyes at least, made her his. And there had been no mistake about that look in his eyes, about that smile on his face.

If she could just get to know him, she thought; if she was just given time, perhaps she could forget Chris Darby.

The trembling came again—that sense of helplessness.

"Clear for launching," Acra-non said. "Five of you men will have to fill in as crew. Man the batteries."

No," Aline said, "Wait another five minutes."

Five minutes ticked away. Acra-non said, "We have to move. It's Lon-den's orders."

She felt that if the cruiser moved she would involuntarily scream. Something seemed to vibrate inside her. She rushed to the airlock, pressed the studs, and soon was out in the brittle cold. Her hands went numb before she'd gone twenty steps and her cheeks stung as if they were on fire.

She found the tunnel like passage, stumbled along it. Just outside the panel her foot struck Lon-den's body. It was covered with welts and bruises and blood oozed out of a gash on his head.

It seemed frozen stiff.

With hands that had no feeling, she struggled to lift him. He was as heavy as a Novakkan. Her healthy young strength was excessive for a girl, but she could no more lift him than she could've lifted three hundred sixty-eight pounds, earth gravity, of Rahn Buskner.

Acra-non and another appeared behind her. Between them they shouldered him and carried him to the cruiser.

Aline thought that she wouldn't be able to make it herself. Her body, frozen through and through, lost all sense of feeling. Her legs became stiff, refused to respond. But she drove herself on

and collapsed just inside the airlock.

With the men present, the women were calmer. They worked over her and Lon-den, packing them both in ice and letting them regain warmth gradually.

She felt the cruiser lurch, lift, and at some point heard its batteries in action, but wasn't aware of when they crossed the mountain nor how they managed it with the sky full of warships.

There were incessant flashes outside the ports, and the cruiser rocked and seemed blown miles by near bursts, and the air was literally filled with glowing balls of photonic energy going out.

Hours passed after the cruiser settled on firm ground before she was allowed to move about. The women seemed to feel that she and Lon-den belonged in the same compartment, and at some point he reached toward her and took her hand.

"I returned to my era," he said. "Some there feel that mankind is unworthy. I tried to make them understand that so long as such as you exist the race itself has more good than bad. I was delayed in returning and as I came through a nearby burst shook down stone and marble. I made it to the passage but could go no farther. I owe my life to you".

"And I owe mine to you," she said.

The battle still raged outside. The airlock was open and a constant roaring, as of wind, reached them.

Acra-non entered, said, "The Novakkans checked our markings as we crossed the mountain and put up a barrage the like of which has rarely been seen. Their ships have withdrawn into space, but the ground defense hopes to hold out until relief comes. They are driving the Egs and Golgons on the planet as slaves, and expect to contest every foot of ground."

"Any other news?" Aline asked to stop her sudden trembling.

"Rahn Buskner," Acra-non went on, "has broken through to Earth. He tore their fleet apart off Pluto, avoided the forts on the moons of Jupiter, and Mars, smashed through the ring of space stations, and circled the planet just beneath them where they couldn't fire on his armada without firing on their own installations below."

Aline's trembling increased. "Any word of my mother, Aleta?"

"News of what's going on there is not clear," Acra-non explained. "But reports from Delos, still in communication with Earth, were picked up by the Novakkans here. It cheered them up in the face of defeat. They claim Rahn Buskner has rescued Aleta, laid waste the city where she was imprisoned, had the building itself taken apart piece by piece and reduced to dust and that he's scorching the area for a hundred miles in every direction with radioactive poison, so that nothing may live there for a thousand years, as a reminder of Novakkan vengeance."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AS she stepped out of the cruiser, Aline felt a tremor in the ground. Hot gusts of wind struck her. There was rosy twilight on every side and she could see that the cruiser was under an overhanging ledge at the foot of the mountain. The city stretched away below to the plain in the distance, where the tortured remains of inumerable ships lay twisted and blackened.

Near at hand great flashes occurred at regular intervals and huge masses of concentrated photonic energy leaped heavenward Farther away the flashes seemed smaller, and in the semi-darkness she could follow the course of the energy with her eyes. It was endless, as if it were raining glowing drops upward, as far as her eyes could see.

Overhead the radiant courses of the ships stretched like threads of a spiderweb. They flashed, glowed as pinpoints of light, as their batteries emptied their energy.

The city was a mass of smoking rubble. Hardly one stone lay on top another.

And in all that expanse no human movement was visible. The flashes near at hand seemed to come from the very ground itself. In the distance it was just an endless sparkling, as the sun on disturbed water.

But there were human movements. She detected them later. At the moment she was attracted by agonized sounds above the gusty roaring of the wind. She had wondered where the uninjured women were. Now she discovered them in the shadow of the mountain, on a flat surface below.

They looked half dead from exhaustion. As she approached, with Lon-den at her side, she thought she had never seen a more haggard group of humans. And in the next moment it seemed that all the breath was drawn out of her body by the sight that met her eyes

Wounded. Covered with something the exact color of the terrain. Wounded and dead. Wounded and dying. They numbered tens of thousands, Novakkans, Egs, Golgons and Earthmen. As her eyes took in the sight, vast acres of humans, lying inert side by side at the foot of the mountain, as far as her sight could reach, she thought she was going to faint.

Instead, she hurried forward. And throughout the nine long hours of twilight she completely forgot herself and her own plight.

Eg doctors, Golgons, men of strange races from remote corners of the galaxy, Earthmen among them, men who spoke precisely as the Earthmen, men who rumbled as Novakkans, harsh voices, soft voices, feminine voices and men she couldn't understand at all, worked in feverish desperation. They paid no attention to who she was, the gun and blade she wore, gave not a thought to her fine garments, merely told her what to do, when they could make her understand, or showed her by illustration.

And they gave her no rest, not even when she felt that she would drop.

When yellow daylight came she knew she looked as haggard as the other women.

But still they didn't let her stop. They stripped her cruiser of every inch of bandage, tore fine garments into strips, took every cubic centimeter of medicants, every gram of powder, and they drove her and the other women until they did drop, until they lay resting beside the wounded.

Food and water were major problems. She went twelve hours without a drink, and when she was finally given a drink by one of the other women it was taken away from her to ease the thirst of the dying.

Lon-den and Acra-non had vanished. Two of the crewmen stood guard over the cruiser, futilely, because they could not keep those desperate men from taking what they wanted, but successfully because they could keep the wounded from crawling in there to die.

Others of the men worked as she worked, were driven as she was driven, and they made no complaint.

Lon-den and Acra-non returned at mid-day. They brought food and a container of water, and the doctors who tried to confiscate it found themselves facing blades and men who meant to add other scores to the rows of dead or dying, if the issue was forced.

They rationed the food and water to those from the cruiser and gave what was left to the wounded.

Aline satisfied her thirst but found that she could hardly eat. The stench of burns, the sight of gaping wounds, the odor of the dead, had sickened her.

The flashing and shaking and roaring went on and on. More wounded were brought until there wasn't a square foot of space in which to place them.

Armed Novakkans, wearing dull fabrics that wouldn't reflect light to the ships

overhead, came and studied the scene. They were not interested in the injured; their ruby eyes searched for able-bodied.

They singled out six women from the cruiser and four men, told them they were needed elsewhere. Acra-non and Lon-den stepped forward.

In trembling fear, Aline watched the Denovian and the godlike man from the future, watched until she knew that in another moment the killing would begin.

With a cry, she rushed forward, confronted the Novakkans.

"I," she said, holding her chin high, "am Rahn Buskner's daughter. Leave these people alone."

They pushed her aside, went to the cruiser, searched it, satisfied themselves. They departed without the men and women, but took every yard of cloth they could find.

Acra-non closed the airlock and stood guard himself. When a doctor came and said, "You have a hydroponic well inside and a machine that draws water from the atmosphere, and we must have them both," he brought out his photon gun.

Aline talked with Lon-den, then told Acra-non, "We'll have to let them in and out. They've been using the food and water. If we stop them they may call the armed men. Besides, it's only humane."

Just before rosy twilight, ships came low across the mountain, decelerated suddenly and landed on the plain, instantly to disgorge troops.

It happened so fast the ground batteries couldn't swing into position to sweep the area before the ships themselves blazed into action. How many positions they knocked out in those few minutes, as twilight darkened the scene, couldn't be estimated, but troops, tiny figures, looking like ants at that distance, fanned out from the ships, taking cover behind twisted wreckage, and fought their way toward the smoking ruins that had been the city.

Throughout the nine hours of semi-darkness ships continued coming down and at daybreak Aline saw hand-to-hand fighting half a mile below.

She had never dreamed that Earthmen, men the size of Chris Darby, could stand up to Novakkans, but as the wounded were dragged up to the flat, to replace the dead stacked in piles and burned, she saw that they were armed with fantastic weapons.

They wore metal, clawlike gloves and built into each glove were a spring knife, a raygun and something that discharged a colorless vapor. Over their bodies, she saw, where their clothes had been burned off, thin armor, the joints of which were powered mechanically and responded to the flexing of their muscles. It amounted to mechanical muscles and made them stronger than Novakkans.

But the Novakkans bitterly contested every step of the way, with rayguns, with long knives, as she could see by the horrible gashes in the Earthmen, even through their armor, by leading them into pitfalls, by every trick and strategem of the Novakkan fighting man, and they left rows of dead as they retreated.

By noon the city was in the hands of Earthmen, what was left of it, and Earth doctors worked side by side with those already on the scene.

The battle went on in the distance, moving out from here, and she heard men say that it was even more horrible to the north and west.

Earthmen came, began disarming them and searching the cruiser. The one who took Acra-non's raygun was later reported to have committed suicide. Those who attempted to disable the batteries inside the cruiser came out staggering, half-blind, and dropped dead a few yards away.

The others went away, reported, and an Earth warship lifted from the plain, settled again on the outskirts of the city, and sighted its batteries on the cruiser. All armed persons were ordered to come

down or die there. The order was shouted from among the rows of wounded. The doctors went on working. The women went on helping.

The warship remained there, with its batteries trained on the cruiser, but didn't fire. Too many innocent were in the way The explosion would bring down the ledge and crush hundreds possibly thousands.

Armed Earthmen moved about cautiously, keeping their eyes on the cruiser, but issued no further orders.

To avoid provoking them, Aline and Acra-non touched the sensitive spots on their blades and left them inside the cruiser. She was about to lay aside her raygun, but he wouldn't permit it. He hid his own inside his clothes, and handed her a thin belt. "Fasten the gun to it and wear it under your skirt."

It was noticeable as a bulge, but not conspicuous. No Earthmen questioned her about it, but they did take her name and the names of those with her.

She hoped they wouldn't realize that Miss Aline du David was Rahn Buskner's daughter. Then she remembered the rites in the hall, wondered a moment about her name and grasped that she hadn't seen Lon-den in hours.

She asked Acra-non.

"Don't worry about him," Acra-non said. "I think he's fed up with both Earthmen and Novakkans. I wouldn't be surprised if he isn't cooking up something from the future for both of them."

The thought sent chills through her. It brought memory of what he'd told her about others of his era thinking mankind unworthy.

She didn't have time to worry about it. Too many men were begging with their last breath for anything that would ease their dying. The Earthmen were particularly responsive to attention, and even those with limbs gone, bones broken, their insides spilling out, smiled when she kneeled beside them. They took her for an Earthgirl, and in the delirium of their last moments talked of home.

One said, "It's like no other planet. As you come in on the Mars track, with Sol sparkling on its oceans, with its turquoise, bright green and brown colors, its gleaming polar caps, its mountains towering like anthills, its layers of frosty clouds, its rings of space stations, its swarming cities visible as vast beehive lakes, and with Lunar out there, naked and beautiful and smiling, reminding you of sultry nights and a girl in your arms, a girl like you, you suddenly realize you're home, and that no other planet in the universe will ever be half so grand."

It reminded her of Chris Darby. He had felt that way about Earth, as she had since felt about Unor, but he loved Delos, too, and told her that he might settle there

The thought stirred a surging in her breast, and tears fell on the youth as he died.

She wondered why, out of all the suffering and dying she had seen, she would shed tears over one young man who thought longingly of her mother's native planet in his last moments.

She received a summons. It was delivered politely and worded as a request: "Would she join the commander and officers of the SYZ forces, and the commander and officers of the Earth supporting forces, for dinner aboard a war ship? They wished to express their gratitude for her neutral services rendered to the wounded of both sides. She was at liberty to be accompanied by a modest retinue provided they were unarmed."

She talked with Acra-non, told him she couldn't go alone.

"They promise safe conduct both ways," he admitted, "but I don't like the idea of shedding my gun. And they have ways of detecting it."

She talked with others, both men and women, and finally Lon-den appeared and settled the matter.

"We all go," he said. "And keep your

gun. If it's the metal they detect I think my own composition will confuse them. It will register on any meter calculated to detect metal." He turned to Aline. "Yours, I think will move the needle a trifle. You're not wholly of this era."

CHAPTER TWELVE

As she entered the vast wardroom, which had been cleared and laid for a feast, she saw how it differed from the Spartan bareness of a raider. The table was spread with gleaming linen. The cutlery was finely engraved and seemed endless in its number of pieces. The chairs were of foam and molded to the shape. Soft light came from some hidden source.

In a smaller connecting room officers stood drinking and talking. At sight of her, and the other women in the group, they hurried out, bringing drinks. She had never witnessed so much courtesy, so much polite and eager attention to her sex.

Then she saw him. He looked older and there were tight lines in his features. Instead of the torn and smoke-blackened uniform he had worn on Unor, he was resplendent in braid, in the uniform of commander.

The trembling came in her legs, in her body. She was thankful that Lon-den was on one side of her, Acra-non the other. She clutched at their arms to steady herself.

He advanced, stood before her. It was a moment before he could murmur the conventional words of greeting, another moment before she could respond.

He offered his arm, and as others moved about the table, led her into the connecting room.

"I wanted to get word to you," he said, that I had nothing to do with taking your mother from Unor. I didn't learn of it until we were well out into space. I didn't even know the commander planned to take a ship. You believe me?"

She could hardly speak. She finally said, "I've heard that mother has been rescued. Is it true?"

He nodded. "But you won't hear it spoken of here as a rescue. Commander Dynell, whose Earth units supported our forces in the action here, has some bitter terms for it. I learned from older officers that he's carrying an old grudge. He was in command of the forces convoying the reparation settlements at the conclusion of the war between Earth and SYZ. He bore the brunt of the blame for losing the settlements to raiders. He has never forgotten the bitterness of the investigations at the time. He wants to reopen the whole thing and make somebody else the scapegoat."

"But I know mother did nothing dishonorable."

He nodded. "I've checked into that myself. The fleet already had orders before her message came from this planet. *Intelligence* was misled. It had information from numerous sources that large numbers of ships were grouped behind the dead star

"Everything indicates," he added, "your mother thought she was performing a service. And she was doing it at great risk to herself. She should be awarded a medal. But for Dynell the charges would be dropped and she would be welcomed by the millions on Earth who adore her."

"Is she safe? Is she well?"

He glanced about casually. "I'm not supposed to pass on information, but I don't see what harm can come of my telling you she was in splendid health at last report. She was urgently warning those in the vicinity of her imprisonment to move away before Rahn Buskner came."

"She knew he would come?"

"She never doubted it, but it's believed she stopped him from laying waste other cities and persuaded him to take her home to Unor."

"Is he doing that?"

Again Darby glanced about, "They were last reported far out from Earth on a course that would enable them to join forces with the third armada."

"And Moxol?"

He was even more hesitant. "The reports are already aboard," he said. "I suppose it can do no harm. It's true that he maneuvered rings around the SYZ and Earth fleets in the SYZ System. They could never predict his next move. When they thought he was coming out to fight he would strike a planet, and when they thought he was moving on another planet he would appear on their flank or rear, with that deceptive lateral motion, strike and vanish."

"Where is he now?"

"His movements are hard to track, but last reports placed him in a position where he could turn to join Rahn Buskner or move in this direction. We fear the latter. It means—" He broke off abruptly.

"It means," Aline finished for him, "that you retook these planets here so that no threat would be behind you when you faced him." Her tone was bitter. "And you'll fight until one or both are dead."

Getting the words out steadied her. The bitterness had been there eating away at her insides. It had made her tremble. Giving voice to it helped. But it didn't alter that dead feeling of hopelessness.

He led her to the table, placed her on his right. The others remained standing until they had seated themselves.

A heavyset, gray man he had pointed out as Commander Dynell rose at the other end of the table and lifted his glass. "I have saved good news for this occasion," he said. "The bulk of the Earth fleet, held in reserve between this system and SYZ, was released yesterday, when success attended our efforts here, and is now about to intercept Rahn Buskner." He lifted his glass high. "To the crushing of Buskner's butchers to the last ship. To the conviction and hanging of that vicious traitor Aleta Winrow."

A hand touched Aline's arm; a whisper sounded in her ear. "You don't have to drink to that." Aloud, the SYZ commander said, "Out of courtesy to my guest, Miss Du David, who is not drinking, I shall refrain from joining you ladies and gentlemen."

She noticed that Lon-den and Acraron also refrained.

The food was served, strange and delectable dishes from Delos, from Earth, from planets toward Andromeda. Under other circumstances she would've been delighted. Now it seemed there was nothing but bitterness.

She said, "Isn't there some hope for peace?"

The man on her right replied glibly, "Just as soon as we rid the galaxy of Novakkans."

From her other side: "The Council of Councils wants peace. The populace of Earth and Delos want it. The fighting is holding up our colonizing toward Andromeda. There is hardly anyone who doesn't want peace," The voice was lowered. "But Dynell won't be satisfied until your mother stands trial for treason."

"But mother is innocent—"

"They need a scapegoat. They want somebody to pay for their blundering of years ago."

All eyes turned toward the entranceway. An officer stood there with a memorandum in his hand. "Report from Relay, sir," he said.

Dynell raised his voice. "You know better than to interrupt us here. Make your report later and then report for discipline."

"Yes, sir, but the report is for Commander Darby, and it's urgent."

"Make your report," Darby said.

"Yes, sir. We've had trouble keeping track of Moxol's movement, as you know, but at last we've got him pinpointed."

"Go on," Dynell roared. "Don't just stand there. Give us the location and we'll start ships out after him and his

murderers."

"Yes, sir. But it may not be necessary, sir. He's coming this way."

"Where is he?" Dynell thundered, coming to his feet.

"He's already struck the outer planets, sir, and I have to report he's overrunning them in less than half the time it took us, even with the aid of our garrisons. He's joined with the third armada and is moving in this direction so rapidly that we may expect to be locked in a death grip before daylight."

There was a long moment of tense silence, then Aline spoke, "Can you get me a visicom channel to Moxol? I'm his sister. I can make him see that this must stop."

Dynell's voice was loud and harsh. "If that woman is sister to that murderer she doesn't belong at this table. She belongs in irons."

Darby came to his feet. His voice was quiet but firm. "It is necessary for me to inform you, Commander Dynell, that we are aboard an SYZ ship and I am in command. Miss Du David and those with her are my guests. It is possible she can aid us in putting an end to bloodshed."

He turned to the officer in the doorway. "Order Relay to make every effort to clear a channel to the commander of the unfriendly armada advancing on us. Expedite it with these key words: 'Will Moxol speak with his sister Aline du David?' Have Relay put it through, monitored, to our communication room."

The officer departed. Aline was hurried along to the communication room, pushed close to a large screen Darby said, "Let him see you first."

The screen lit up and gradually the view cleared. In the background were green-tinged giants working over machines. Visible beyond them were visicoms bringing in views of the smoking surface of a planet. In the foreground Moxol was bending over instruments, making calculations. Without looking up, he snapped, "Have the lower formation reverse direction and strike on a tangent. They're expecting to be hit from the other side." A Novakkan passed the order on in code.

Aline had been holding her breath. She seemed to be right in Moxol's presence. In her own body she could feel the tension of the life and death decision he had just made. His name came out in a stifled cry:

"Moxol!"

He looked up. His olive features were lined with fatigue, his reddish brown eyes were bright.

"I'm on an SYZ warship," she said.

He stared straight at her, his voice low, tense, dynamic. "They will give you safe conduct to a neutral planet," he said. "Or I will shackle ten thousand of their own to the hulls of my ships and carry them into space."

The Novakkans behind him went on working, separating reports, graphing the action below.

Moxol lifted his eyes and looked beyond her at the uniformed men. Again his voice was restrained, but powerful in its dynamic vibrancy. "If any harm befalls my sister not a single Earthman will escape alive from this system."

"But Moxol," she cried, "they're not harming me. There's been enough killing. It's time to make peace. It can be done, I know it can if you and these men will sit down and talk terms."

Darby pressed close against her, said, "She's right, Moxol. We can reach terms. I'm not yet empowered to act for the Council, but I know they'd go a long way to achieve an honorable peace."

Dynell's loud voice broke in, "Surrender that traitor. And—"

"This is not the moment to dictate terms," Darby interrupted. Again to Moxol: "My officers and I will meet you aboard a neutral ship, your sister's cruiser, try to reach terms, and I will make a full and unbiased report to the Council."

Moxol weighed that briefly and said, "Rahn Buskner already has Aleta safe,

but he will insist that the charges against her be dropped and that she be received anywhere in the galaxy as the queen she is. It is possible we can come to terms. But my raiders are in action. I must clear all channels and communicate with Rahn Buskner. You'll receive word within two hours where to meet me. In the cruiser."

"I," Dynell roared, "will not be a party to this—unless they first agree to surrender that traitor and withdraw their forces from his area of the galaxy."

Darby made no effort to quiet him. The screen had gone dark.

Dynell continued to protest. Lon-den stepped close to him, said, "I can demonstrate why you must make peace. If you will accompany us to the cruiser I will show you weapons that will make yours seem like toys."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ABOARD the cruiser Lon-den said, "I am not precisely aware of how much energy is required to destroy a warship."

A young Earth officer volunteered the information: "A heavy unit can withstand a direct hit by hydrogen atomics. It will be blown out of its course but comparably undamaged, its firepower in no way impaired. Only a direct hit, or a series of indirect hits, by photonics will destroy it. I'm alluding to photonics of the mass and power another warship or a heavy ground battery is capable of delivering."

"Then it would seem impossible that this cruiser could destroy a warship?"

Smiles spread. The officer spoke quickly, "A single battery aboard a warship will weigh more than this cruiser. It could not deliver a broadside hot enough to warm the food required to feed the crew of a warship."

Lon-den turned to Darby. "More than a score of wrecked raiders and warships are on the plain. Are they of any value?"

"Not even for scrap," Darby replied. "When photonics hit them squarely they're done for."

"Will you move out the undamaged ships, and men?"

"This is a trick," Dynell growled. "That man is a dangerous alien aiding the Novakkans."

"But an unfriendly armada is moving on us," Darby said. "I don't want my ships caught sitting. I'm ordering them aloft." He turned to an aide. "Clear the plain of all ships and personnel. Let no person approach nearer than thirty miles.

A float appeared outside the cruiser, deposited a courier. Admitted to their presence, the courier reported, "At mid-twilight you are requested to take the cruiser straight up, away from the dead star, and using this planet as a basis, proceed until you achieve a seventy-degree angle the hypotenuse of which extends to the yellow star. Moxol will come aboard at the point."

Dynell again protested. Aside, Darby told Aline that he was certain he could reach satisfactory terms, but was equally certain Dynell would spike any agreement. He hoped that Lon-den's demonstration would be impressive, because everything depended on converting the Earth fleet commander.

The plain was cleared of all but wreckage. The twisted bulks of ships were scattered for miles. Rough computations established that five thousand heavy photonic charges had been expended in reducing the ships to their present condition.

Lon-den addressed Dynell. "Will you calculate the range and align the batteries of this cruiser?"

Dynell snorted, "I doubt if they will even reach that far." His calculations were hasty and a trifle inaccurate. Acranon started to correct them, but Lon-den waved him aside. "Close enough," he said. "Everyone will please put on shields."

Dynell made no protest about this.

The glare of photonic energy going out often hurt the eyes.

"This is what you may face," Lon-den said, "if you do not make peace." His fingers swept like light across the row of keys that actuated the batteries.

As she watched, Aline saw, not the glare of photonic energy, but thin coalescing streams of blue stretching outward from the cruiser. They struck a little to the left of the center of the plain. They seemed to halt there until their ends broke free from the cruiser and, as rubber, leaped to join them.

Then they began expanding outward. It happened in seconds, but always she would remember it as though it had taken hours. The center glowed brighter than a star, blinding in its brilliance even through shields. The blue ring went on out and out, the brilliant center swelling and following it until it seemed nothing but a thread around a miniature sun.

It vanished and then she watched the implosion that followed. She saw objects miles away snatched toward that center.

Seconds later the concussion rolled over the cruiser. It rocked as in the midst of a photonic explosion. Part of the ledge overhead smashed down on it.

The airlock was not completely closed and the sound that reached them left them deaf for nearly a minute.

And then, as the air cleared, they saw that not a single scrap of twisted wreckage was left on the plain. More than a score of ships had vanished as if they had never existed.

As the others stood in awe, Dynell whipped out his raygun and levelled it at Lon-den's heart. "That alien," he said, as he pressed the trigger, "is too dangerous to live."

Too numb to utter a sound, Aline watched the godlike creature sink slowly. Over his heart was a blackened spot. The beam had gone clear through.

As she sank beside him, she heard Dynell snarl, "And I will not allow others to betray Earth. I'm putting you, Darby, in irons. I myself will meet Moxol and take him prisoner."

Lon-den's pulses were stilled; his breathing stopped. He had looked a god in life. Now he was just another corpse of the war.

Tears started in Aline's eyes. She blinked them back. Her features went tight. Her jaw set firmly. Something of Moxol's fierce intensity shone out of her eyes. She rose slowly.

With her back to the others, she lifted her skirt, brought out her raygun. Turning slowly, she reversed it, extended it toward Dynell. "Lest you think that I, too, am too dangerous to live."

As his hand reached to close about, it, she quickly faced away. She was hardly aware of the flash that followed. Her eyes were closed. She didn't want to look again at Lon-den in death. She wanted to remember him as he had lived.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DARBY said, "It took some doing, but I'm at last empowered by the Council to make peace. The terms have already been stated. The pact will be drawn up here in the neutral Eg System when Rahn Buskner and emissaries from Earth arrive. Are you happy about it?"

Aline pressed close. "Very," she said.

"Both sides are to help in reconstruction on the Eg planets. The Novakkans are to substitute trading for raiding. Poetic, eh? How does it sound?"

"Wonderful."

"And Earth is to return to them the Lexn System and receive charts of thousands of energy fields, along with information about their discoveries on remote planets. Culture will advance centuries overnight."

Aline waited. He was thoughtful, frowning. Finally he said, "What did you do with that gun you carried?"

"Gave it to Acra-non. I'm also going to give him the cruiser."

"Hm—m! It's yours, of course, to do with as you please. But scientists want to examine it, to learn why it won't repeat its performance of yesterday, now that your friend is dead."

"It's my mother's and her message advised me to part with it."

"And speaking of yesterday," he went on, "it's strange about Dynell. He wasn't the type to commit suicide. But all of us saw it. And it wiped out the opposition to peace. I guess his mind suddenly broke when he realized he had killed your friend."

Friend? The word sounded strange to Aline. She remembered the rites in the big marble hall. Tears started in her eyes, but she blinked them back, pressed closer to Darby.

There would be other rites on Delos. this time sealing a contract she could wholeheartedly fulfill.

END OF BOOK TWO

Did you miss Book One of "Reckoning From Eternity," of which the book you have just read is one of three? Well, don't let it annoy you—just send 10c to cover the cost of handling, postage and an envelope to Ray Palmer, Amherst, Wisconsin, and he'll send you a copy of the November issue containing Book One free of charge. And if you liked Book Two, make sure you don't miss the greatest of the three—"Infinity To Infinity" in the April issue of OTHER WORLDS. Reserve your copy at your newsdealer now.

★ ★ ★

Learn what happened to Moxol, the son of Rahn Buskner and Aleta Winrew, when he found a witch named Eleva on a Mallikan pleasure ship, and while the red Blood dripped from his blade, heard from her lips a prophecy that was to be fulfilled to the letter, as he became the scourge of the Universe, and known as Moxol the Murderer:

"Within seven hundred days your name will crackle across the galaxy. It will be written in blood. On planets unnumbered you will be hated, feared, and the price on your head will be so great it will give courage to the faintest of heart. Everywhere you turn your life will be sought. By the sign of three stars your destiny will be entwined.

"The yellow star is a woman, tall, stately, fair, a queen. Men have died because of her, and because of her the galaxy will be divided. At the head of an armada stretching from star to star Moxol the Murderer will prevail

"The red star is a girl, slender, sensitive, auburn of hair, blue of eyes. From another era she will coax life and weapons of unlimited power. She will cast her lot with that of a man accepted as a god, whose power is greater than an armada. She will bring peace, but it is only a lull . . . for there is yet the dark star.

"The dark star is the spirit of life and mystery in a dark sultry girl, soon to become a woman of bewitching charm and power to move men. Her net is spread over Moxol the Murderer, and the spell that she will cast will unleash the furies of hell. It will be she who opens the gate to another era and all the terrors of mortal and immortal creation from

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SPACE IS FOR THE YOUNG

By Lou Tabakow

Captain Bruckmann had at last reached that critical point when he must face the reality staring him in the face - - he was old, . . old . . too old to be a pilot in the rigors of space.

"ARE you all right, Captain?"

Captain Allen Bruckmann slowly opened his eyes and shook his head dazedly from side to side, trying to dislodge the last clinging wisps of unconsciousness. As his head cleared, he looked up at the concerned face of Lieutenant Horstley, his second officer.

"Gosh, Captain, you had us all worried for a minute there," said the Lieutenant, his face breaking into a relieved smile. "We thought you were *never* coming out of blackout."

Startled, the Captain gripped the armrests of his acceleration couch, and raising up, looked around. The pilot room was crowded with officers, and in the open doorway he could see a huddle of enlisted men, straining forward for a better look.

He swung to his feet, though still a little unsteady, and looked about with quick, ferret like glances.

"All right! Clear out, all of you!" he barked. "Think this is a three ring circus? Get back to your posts!"

The enlisted men faded from the doorway, to make room for the hurried exodus of officers. Lieutenant Horstley walked over and shut the door after the last of them had gone.

Captain Bruckmann glanced at him "Uh — Lieutenant. did everyone come out of blackout okay?"

"Yessir! You were the last — I mean . . ."

"Never mind," the Captain put in hastily. "You'd better check the posts." . The Lieutenant saluted smartly and turned toward the door

"Uh — Bill . . ."

Lieutenant Horstley turned around, his hand on the knob

"Never mind the formality when we're alone. Sorry I flew off the handle, but I was still a little groggy."

"Yessir! I understand." He started to salute again, thought better of it, and smiled at the Captain. "Guess I'd better check the posts now."

As the door closed, Captain Bruckmann raised the hinged armrest of his acceleration couch and removed the 'graf He studied the wavy lines intently. Blood pressure — Reflexes — Encephelopattern—Adrenalin count, his eyes ran down the list.

Guess I should have gotten more sleep before take-off, he alibied to himself. *Shouldn't drink so much either. Just as fit as I ever was, if I'd take better care of myself.*

He clamped his lips in anger, and crumpling the 'graf sheet in his fist, flung it across the room. *What the Hell's the use of kidding myself? I know what the crew's thinking. "The Old Man's getting soft. Can't take it any more." Knew I couldn't stay in active Space Service forever, anyway. But dammit! I feel as fit as I did on my kiwi run.* He smiled wryly. *Or am I just*

kidding myself?

He checked to make sure the autopilot was locked on course, and started for the engine room. In the corridor just outside, three kiwis stood talking. As he passed, they lowered their voices.

Probably speculating on who would command the Denmark on her next trip. He whirled on them.

"Are you men too tired to bother saluting your Captain?" he asked, sarcastically.

"Nosir! Sorry sir!" The kiwis, flustered and nervous, awkwardly brought their forefingers to their temples.

That was a big deal, he castigated himself, as he continued on down the passageway. *Taking your spite out on those kids.*

The Denmark, like most space-ships was necessarily as small as possible. The crew was thrown constantly together in the limited space. Consequently, though there was no regulation to that effect, salutes were used only when approaching an officer on official business.

He paused as he passed the Astrogation Room, then pushed open the door. The astrogator was bent over a chart with a compass, while his computers hummed busily. He looked up slowly.

"Everything okay?' asked the Captain.

"Yessir. Right on course." He hesitated a moment. "Uh — Captain, will you look over this new landing trajectory for Earth approach?"

The Captain bent over the chart, studying it. "What's wrong with the one Marsport gave us?"

"Nothing. Except if we come in on this trajectory I've been working out, we ought to save at least fifteen tons of fuel."

"What's the matter, Lieutenant, bucking? Trying to make a name for yourself?"

The astrogator looked at him in surprise and anger. "No sir! I just thought . . ."

"Look, Lieutenant," interrupted the Captain. "I was bringing ships back to Earth on Marsport trajectories while you were still playing with model spaceships. We've got sufficient fuel and we know the trajectory we've been given is tested and safe."

"But sir, there's absolutely no danger in this other trajectory either. Look! You see for yourself."

"That'll be all, Lieutenant," said the Captain, in a final tone. "We'll approach Earth as planned. I've never lost or damaged a ship yet, and I don't intend to start taking unnecessary chances now."

"Yessir!" said the astrogator, in a sullen voice.

Captain Bruckmann looked at him sharply, then turned and left the room.

Every young punk that gets his Astrogation Degree thinks he can improve on the tested old courses, the Captain mumbled to himself. He ran his hand through his hair. *Guess I was the same way though. Still, that idea I had about re-arranging the meteor detectors did work out. Now there're no blind spots to worry about. But if Captain Teresino hadn't let me try it. . . .*

A little ashamed, he started back toward the astrogation room, but then, changing his mind, he shrugged his shoulders, and continued on down the passageway.

In the engine room, Sergeant Rosen was bent over a table strewn with small pieces of metal. He was filing a small metal strip he held in his hand.

"What're you doing there, Joe?" asked Captain Bruckmann.

"This thermostat's on the blink, and I was just trying to get it working again."

"Draw a new one from the supply room," countered the Captain. "You know a space-ship's no place to use jury-rigged equipment."

"Jury-rigged?" countered the sergeant in an aggrieved tone. "I know every bolt and rivet in this tin can. When I retire, I'm gonna set up my own little machine shop — one more trip."

He hesitated a moment. "What're you gonna do when you retire, Captain?"

"What made you ask me that?" cried Captain Bruckmann, angrily. "Think I'm too old for space? Or maybe you forgot; I'm *still* Captain of the Denmark."

"Oh, come off it, Captain. I been busted so many times I wear detachable stripes now. I been with you for a long time and you ought to know me better than that. Would I have asked for a transfer to the Denmark when they put you in command, if I didn't like serving under you?"

"Sure, Joe, I know," said the Captain putting his hand on the sergeant's shoulder. "I've just been a little on edge lately. Sorry."

"Aw, that's okāy, Captain." His face broke into a grin.

"Say, Captain, remember the time you busted me, there on Venus?"

"Sure. I remember, Joe," grinned the Captain. "That was *some* little gal you were shacked up with. Can't say I blame you for missing the ship. Seems like quite a while ago," he mused. "Let's see, when was that? Back in forty-two. wasn't it?"

"Yeh, I think so."

"What ever happened to her? I remember you swore you'd come back and marry her."

"Well, you know how it is, Captain. Space sorta gets in your blood. A woman is . . . well . . . anyway when you get out here, away from everything, land and land-lubbers seem like . . . well, different from us. This is where we *belong*." He swung his arm in an arc.

"This ship is home, and well . . . the whole Universe is *our* world. Anyway you oughta see Tola now. She's big as a Venusian Tunnla, and got a whole string of kids."

The Captain cleared his throat. "Joe, what're we going to *do* when they retire us? After all these years in space . . ."

"Well, it'll be tough at first, I guess, but we'll get used to the idea of being land-lubbers." He grinned. "They say you can even get used to hanging — if you hang long enough. Anyway Captain, we both know we can't take it like we used to. Space is for the young!"

"Sure Joe, guess you're right," agreed the Captain, with a sigh. He started out and then turned. "And Joe . . ."

"Yessir?"

"Better draw that new thermostat."

"Sure, Captain."

Captain Bruckmann stepped out into the now deserted corridor. He looked up and down its length. *Guess they're all keeping out of my way,* he thought bitterly. *Guess they don't want the Old Man to see their pity. Dammit, though! I don't feel old.*

He unlocked the Observation Bubble and stepped in. So wonderfully clear and transparent was the plastic dome, that it gave the illusion of floating free in space. Above and to all sides, the stars hung piercingly bright, steady, and like jewels flung against the black backdrop of space.

As often as he'd stood here and looked out, he'd never lost that first feeling of awe and wonder, at the grandeur — the patient, brooding mystery of these vast reaches of eternal solitude.

Joe's right, he mused. This is home! How can a spaceman ever get used to the cramped horizon — the pettiness of planet life, after he's stood here and looked out?

The Denmark was spiralling in for Earth landing. Decelerating in Instruction "B", she dropped lightly down, down, and the pilot expertly maneuvering the massive ship, touched ground. The trip was over.

Instruction "B"! thought Captain Bruckmann. *The rocking chair landing! Maximum deceleration, two G's. Wonder if the Mars-part astrogators figured that out for me? To make it easier for me?* He snorted in disgust. *Hell! Why*

should they? Their job is just to figure the simplest trajectory and landing. They probably don't even know I'm alive.

The ship was hauled to the Decontamination Chambers and the airlock welded in place. The enlisted men trooped through throwing good-natured insults at each other, and loudly voicing plans for their furlough.

Captain Bruckmann found an empty cubicle and after stripping, deposited his clothes in the chute. He stepped into the booth and pressed the stud which released the various germicidal sprays. He stood there, eyes closed, waiting for the chemical sprays to shut off so he could turn on the water spray. Space was too valuable aboard ship to waste it on non-essentials like water for bathing. The refreshing shower after a trip, was always something to look forward to.

He heard voices from the next cubicle. "Say Harry, where you goin' first? Me, I'm headin' for Memphis. Hope some land-lubber ain't beat my time with Dorrie. What? Marry her? Why should I *buy* it, when I can get it on consignment." Laughter.

Then in lower tones, "Say, I wonder if the Captain's got a girl. He's not such a bad-lookin' guy." A whisper — Laughter. "Naw, I don't think he's *that* old. Okay, I'll meet you right outside the doc's office, soon's we're cleared."

Girls! thought Captain Bruckmann. While the other men had chased around between trips, he'd been studying. That's why he was Captain, and they were still enlisted men. Maybe they were the smart ones though. Here he was, washed up — finished, and he'd lost out on the fun. Well, that was life. He'd gotten what he wanted, and so had they

With a start, he realized the chemical spray had shut off. *Better get a move on,* he admonished himself. The *Admiral doesn't like to be kept waiting.*

He hastily showered and donned the clean uniform laid out for him. He stopped at the desk to pick up his papers which had already been passed through, and headed for the administration building.

The old man and the younger man faced each other across the desk.

The Admiral cleared his throat. "Nice trip, Captain. Right on schedule. But your ship is always on schedule. You've got a record you can be proud of."

"Thank you, Admiral." Captain Bruckmann smiled. "Uh — how long will we be here sir?"

"The Denmark will be laid up for three or four months at least, Captain. We've decided to install those new alloy tubes so she can use the high-temp fuel. We'll have to make changes throughout to get her ready."

"Guess I'd better hang around and check the installation then. I'm not too familiar with the new fuels."

"That won't be necessary, Captain. Go out and relax. Enjoy yourself for a while. You've been on active duty for over a year without a leave."

"When *will* she be ready?"

"Uh — Captain Bruckmann — we're changing the name of the Denmark, after she's been modernized, and uh . . ."

Captain Bruckmann swallowed hard. "Go ahead, say it, Admiral. You're placing a new man in charge— a younger man."

The Admiral hesitated. "Well, it isn't exactly that. We felt that a young man — one who's been trained especially in the use of the newer fuels . . ."

"So I'm washed up — finished."

"No, no!" boomed the Admiral in a hearty voice. "Nothing like that. You're a valuable man to the Service. You're going to take over the office of Joint Procurement. *All* the procurement offices will be under your charge — and Captain, I've already okayed a step-up in rank for you. As soon as the council signs it . . ."

"So I'm being kicked upstairs," said the Captain bitterly. "After all those years out there . . ."

"Let's be realistic, Captain," put in the Admiral. "You're two years past retirement age already. We can't afford to take chances. Space is a harsh mistress. It takes great stamina and perfect co-ordination to cope with the problems that arise out there. No one knows that better than you, man."

"But age alone isn't the whole answer," argued the Captain. "A man's as old as he feels. Why ground a man after years of experience in space, just because he's passed some arbitrary age limit?"

"It isn't an arbitrary limit," put in the Admiral. "We kept you in space two years beyond retirement age, because your physical condition warranted it. After all, you've spent more years in space than any man in the Service. But now, your medical report . . . ." He picked up a sheaf of papers and waved them.

"But what can I do on Earth? Space is all I know."

"We need good administrators. We can use your ability and experience here." He stood up and slapped the Captain on the back. "Take a month's leave. Go out and enjoy yourself. Relax. I'll have the details of your new job worked out by then." He stretched out his hand.

Captain Bruckmann swallowed, and shook hands, then turned dejectedly toward the door. The Admiral's Aide came in and stood watching silently, as the Captain, head bent in defeat, walked slowly past him.

As the door closed, the Admiral sighed and cleared his throat. "I hate the job of breaking it to them. They all think they're the exception to the rule. They think their life is done when they're grounded."

The Aide smiled.

The Admiral continued. "He's had his life *in* space. Resiliency and top physical condition can't last *forever*. Space is for the *young*, the *really* young — and the captain's past twenty-seven."

THE END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF OTHER WORLDS Science Stories published Bi-Monthly at Evanston, Illinois for October 1, 1955.

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RAYMOND A PALMER
Signature of editor, business manager.
Sworn to and subscribed before me this 4th day of October, 1955.
CHESTER V. LEPAK
(My commission expires January 20, 1957)

The

"Oh well," said the Professor, "it probably wouldn't have worked anyhow."

PROFESSOR Bickerstaffe panted slightly as he telephoned the editor, for he was bubbling and boiling over with pride in his new discovery. "I have developed a serum," he said. "If my theories are correct it will be the greatest discovery in the history of mankind. Put this into your paper: two drops of my formula will make a man immortal. You may quote me. I expect to spread immortality over the whole earth. Goodbye. Don't forget to send photographers."

He sat back in his chair and began to dream delightful dreams, full of fame and riches. He would accept praise, awards, medals; he would walk knee-deep in fields of glory; he would be investigated by congress.

This time his announcement was not premature—he was sure of that. Last year he had invented a perpetual motion machine which had stopped after sixteen seconds. The year before he had found part of a flying saucer which turned out to be a 1906 dime with a dent

Two drops of Professor Bickerstaffe's formula was enough to make a man immortal. That's what he claimed . . . . . .

IMMORTALITY of PROFESSOR BICKERSTAFFE

By

T. P. Caravan

in it. And before that he had developed a baldness cure which ate holes into the skull and turned the brain purple. But now he was sure that the public test of his latest discovery would secure him a life of everlasting bliss.

Immortality! His voice trembled whenever he said the word, trembled and grew thick with emotion

A knock on the door: "Good afternoon," said an elderly gentleman. "My colleagues and I are a voluntary committee dedicated to the preservation of righteousness. We decided to visit you as soon as we were informed of your discovery. I presume the reports are exaggerated?"

Professor Bickerstaffe bowed. "The reports were correct," he said. "Will you step into my laboratory? There is the apparatus which manufactures the distillation. There are my notes. There is the formula—be careful with it, for it is my only copy. And here, sirs, is a beaker full of the liquid itself. I propose to drink it as soon as the photographers arrive. The final test! And then, if my theories are correct —" the wonder of it made his voice grow hoarse "—immortality!!"

"Quite so," said the gentleman. "That is why we have come. And you are sure your theories are correct?"

Memories of his past experiments tumbled through Professor Bickerstaffe's head, but he shoved them out again. "I am sure," he said.

"Very well," said the gentleman. He entered the laboratory, followed by his assistants One of them set fire to the stack of notes and poured acid on the ashes, one of them kicked the intricate apparatus to pieces, one of them poured the contents of the beaker down a rat hole, one of them took the paper on which the formula was written and ate it, one of them took a shotgun and killed a crow which happened to be passing by, and the rest of them held Professor Bickerstaffe firmly in his chair until the laboratory was ruined

"Oh, well," said the professor, "it probably wouldn't have worked anyhow; but I don't see what you gentlemen had against my trying to spread immortality over the world"

"Spread what?"

"Immortality."

"*Immortality!*" cried the gentleman. "I thought you said *immorality*." He led his assistants to the door. "Go ahead with your work and remember to speak more clearly in the future."

So Professor Bickerstaffe went ahead with his work, but he gave up trying to find the formula for immortality. He concentrated on cubing the sphere, instead, and he never forgot to speak clearly in the future.

There was a family of rats living in the rat hole down which the contents of the beaker had been poured, and they never forgot, either.

Not ever.

The BIG NOISE

By Evan Hunter

Psychological warfare, when you get right down to it, is nothing but a lot of noise . . and the bigger the noise, the more scared the enemy . . .

THE two Britishers looked up at the sky, squinting against the sun-drenched blue. One stroked his walrus mustache, dropped his hand, and sighed.

" 'Ere come the bloody beggars," he said.

The other nodded. "Wonder wot it'll be this time."

"Something new, you can bet on that, you can."

"Mmm. Quite so."

The rockets appeared on the horizon, glistening pin-points of silver against the blue. The Britishers watched as the ships swallowed space, their jet trails dying behind them.

They came closer, growing in size, looking like fast-moving tear drops now. There were twelve ships, flying in strict formation, soundlessly streaking across the sky. The lead ship suddenly shot upward, reaching for altitude. and the other ships in the squadron followed.

"Gird y'self," the first Britisher said.

"Aye."

The ships suddenly broke formation, like a bevy of quail running for tall grass. They darted about the sky in a seemingly haphazard fashion, their tail jets puffing out great billows of smoke. They crossed and swerved and dipped and dived and plunged and plummeted.

As quickly as they had broken apart, they came together again.

The word SURRENDER! was scrawled across the sky in smoke.

"Same as yesterday," the first Britisher said.

"Strange."

And then a thousand loudspeakers blared forth simultaneously, thundering into the sky, shattering the ear drums.

"Surrender, foe. Surrender, foe, Surrender, foe."

On and on, in an endless sing-song chant.

"Surrender, foe. Surrender, foe, Surrender, foe."

The rockets streaked over London, executed a precision turn and came back, their speakers blaring loudly.

The first Britisher put his fingers in his ears

"Might at least show a little ingenuity, y' know. Same thing every day for a week now."

The second Britisher already had his fingers in his ears. "Wot?" he asked.

"I say, damned nuisance, isn't it?"

"Oh. Yes, quite."

"How do you suppose they get the sound to travel so far?"

"I dunno. Deucedly clever, though."

"Mmm, yes."

"D'you suppose the Americans will come up with something? They've been in this for close to a fortnight now, y'know".

"I doubt it."

Overheard, the rockets continued their chant. "Surrender, foe. Surrender foe."

"What makes you say that?"

"April 15th," the Britisher said. "They've got their own headaches."

"Yes, I suppose so. Can't be worried about a bloody little war, can they?"

"Surrender, foe. Surrender, foe," the rockets chanted.

Roger Twimberly III paced the floor angrily and pounded a fist into the open palm of his other hand.

"This is awful," he bellowed. "It's been going on for close to three hours now. When will they shut up. Good God, don't they have to go home for fuel or something?"

Commander Chauncey Archibald Beech, Supreme Commander of the Air Ministry, shook his head. "New fangled rockets," he said. "Understand some of them can go for days."

"For *days!*"

"Yes, afraid so. Got to hand it to the buggers. They know how to fight a war all right."

"Well, something must be done," Twimberly shouted. "Get better rockets, Commodore. Get better means of fighting them."

"Doing all we can now, sir," Beech said.

"For example? What have you done recently?"

"Attacked their four major cities only yesterday, sir. Wouldn't be surprised if this were a retaliation raid. Wouldn't be surprised at all."

"What sort of an attack?"

"The usual. Bit more clever, though, if I do say so."

"What sort?"

"Soap bubbles, m'lord."

"Yes, quite effective. Used quite a bit of liquid soap in the operation. Blew the bubbles out of our jets, don't y'know? Each bubble contained a note addressed to the enemy's citizens. When the bubbles reached the streets, they popped! And out dropped the message. Pop! And drop! Quite effective, oh yes."

"What did these notes—these messages—say?"

"Can't quite recall, m'lord. The usual stuff, I suppose. *'Your leader is a brute; depose him!'* Stuff like that." . . . .

"And the results?"

"No recon photos available, sir. Heavy fog, y'know."

"Blast it all. Soap bubbles aren't enough." Twimberly walked to the window. "Listen to that incessant droning out there. It's enough to drive a man loony."

"Steady, sir," Beech said helpfully.

"Sometimes I wonder if the old ways weren't better. Sword against sword, ax against ax, pike against pike. White charges rearing in the heat of battle." Roger Twimberly III struck a pose, one sword-bearing arm outstretched, the other holding the imaginary reins of a white charger. *"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; or close the wall up with our English dead. In peace, there's nothing so becomes a man as modest stillness and humility . . . ."*

"Quite," Beech said.

"Confound it all, what's a man to do? Whose idea was it anyway, Beech?"

"Idea, sir?"

"This whole de-armament balderdash."

"Oh. Chicago Conference. 2010. No, it was 2011. Somewhere around that time, anyway." Beech chuckled lightly. "They thought it would put a stop to war. De-armament, I mean."

"I know what you mean. Well, it hasn't. And if I have to listen to that drivel outside much longer . . ."

"Steady, sir. I've got a new plan of attack.

"Oh?" Twimberly's ears perked up.

"Yes, sir. And if it works, they'll capitulate in a week. I promise."

"What's the plan?" Twimberly asked eagerly.

Beech leaned closer, and his eyes narrowed. His voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper.

"Ping-pong balls," he said.

The British rockets drew silver pencil lines across the skies of Switzerland, the aggressor.

The Swiss looked up anxiously, and little boys ran into their houses for their bubble pipes. The old men knew better. These British were not to be trusted. Soap bubbles the other day, but today—what?

"Les Anglais," one of the old men said.

"Oui," another grunted.

"Avec son sang-froid habituel," the first whispered, watching the gleaming dart like rockets overhead.

They stared through wise eyes, nodding their heads. They puffed complacently on their pipes, terror showing in every ball of smoke that drifted skywards. *Les Anglais.* And soon, *les Americains.*

Ah, les Americains. Panic crossed their hearts, and they puffed complacently on their pipes.

"Voila!" one of the Swiss shouted.

The bellies of the British rockets yawned open, black maws appearing menacingly in their gleaming silver bottoms. The Swiss stared at the awesome crevices, holding their breaths.

And then they came.

Ping-pong balls! Hundreds and thousands and millions of white ping-pong balls floating earthward The Swiss puffed on their pipes, their minds and their hearts screaming. The balls drifted down, caught in the Earth's atmosphere wafting gently with each breeze, down, down, little white, hollow balls.

"Le conference," one of the Swiss said.

Another picked up one of the ping-pong balls as it dropped at his feet and bounced. He held it between the thumb and forefinger of one hand. He lifted his glasses onto his forehead. Terror washed across his face.

"Mmmm," he murmured, in French.

Lettered on the face of the ball, also in French, were the words: *Cessez-vous!* And then, for the benefit of those Swiss who did not read French: *Stop!*

The Swiss all nodded their heads together. *"Le conference,"* they said. The ping-pong balls continued to drift out of the sky.

"By God," Beech shouted, "what do they mean we've broken the rules of the Chicago Conference?"

"Don't shout," Twimberly reminded him. "That's what they said. They've officially protested to the Red Cross. Said we dropped missiles from the sky. Said we endangered lives."

'Missiles, eh? Endangered lives, eh? What about the bloody pamphlets they've dropped? Aren't those missiles?"

"Apparently not."

"What about the butterflies with the messages on their wings? What about those?"

'What about them?"

'Good lord, m'lord — dangerous insects! That's against the rules of the Con . . . "

"Butterflies are not dangerous, Beech," Twimberley said coldly. "As a matter of fact, I've quite a collection."

"Oh"

"Quite."

A hostile silence invaded the room. Both men stared at each other

Finally, Beech sighed. "What's to be done?"

"The Americans."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"We've got to wait for them. They're our only salvation."

God help us.' Beech said. He sighed again

It got worse.

For the next two weeks, it rained in England. Every day, the Swiss rockets swarmed overhead, sowing their little pellets. And every day, it rained. It rained in buckets. It rained in torrents. It rained, and it rained, and there was nothing in the rules of the Conference that said an enemy could not create artificial weather conditions for the

purpose of discomfort.

Then the rain stopped, and it began to snow. It did not snow hard enough to cause any physical damages to the country. That was definitely against the rules. But it snowed on and off, making walking uncomfortable, making picnics impossible.

And the Americans did nothing.

The British waited, and the British wondered. April 15th, that dreaded day, had long since passed. Surely the Americans would make a move soon. Surely. They waited. And they wondered.

And the man in the street sloshed through snow and cursed the Swiss. The Swiss puffed on their pipes and contemplated the outcome of this terrible struggle.

In the meantime, they sent more rockets.

One night, the rockets came bearing a large screen between them. Another group of rockets flew directly below these. The night was moonless and starless, and the rockets were barely discernible overhead

"Wonder wot now?" one Britisher asked.

"Sleet," another answered.

"One thing they wouldn't dare give us."

"Wot's that?"

"Fog."

The rockets spread out, the screen-bearing rockets overhead, the others below. The sky was suddenly ablaze with color. The Britishers gaped upward in wonder. Sound poured down at them, the hearty blast of triumphal trumpets. Images filled the sky.

"I'll be," a bobby said. "Motion pictures. A cinema in the sky!"

The movie showed the surrender of Britain to Switzerland. It was a very good movie, and most Britishers enjoyed it the first time it was run. But by midnight, there were close to a thousand rockets in the sky, all showing the same movie. Some Britishers commented on the excellent acting the second time they saw the show. The show continued all night long. The rockets vanished at dawn, taking their screens with them. They were back at dusk the next night, and they showed the same movie for the next two weeks, despite the unfavorable reviews the *Times* gave it.

And still the Americans did not move.

There was the day the rockets came over and dropped little Swiss flags made of paper. The children put these on their sailboats, and promptly scuttled them.

The Americans were silent.

There was the day the Swiss rockets flew overhead playing Shostakovitch. On and on, discord after discord, until the British eardrums were ready to split.

Still no Americans—the cause seemed lost

And then, finally, the American rockets came. They streaked across the London skies, and the grateful British subjects lifted their voices in hoarse cheers. The rockets plodded ahead, straight on a course for Switzerland, ten thousand strong, flying in precise formation.

The Swiss surrendered the next day.

"But this is phenomenal!" Twimberly said. "You Americans will never cease to amaze me."

"It was nothing," Alexander Williams said, smiling bashfully.

"But it was," Beech insisted. "It most certainly was. How on earth did you do it? Good lord, man, one day! One bloody day!"

"No," Alexander said. "No blood at all."

Twimberly and Beech smiled at the quaint American humor.

"How did you do it?" Beech asked.

"Yes, how?" Twimberly repeated.

"Simple," Alexander said. "We went back into history."

"A time machine?"

"No, nothing of the sort. We just studied books, that's all. That's what

took us so long to get here. We had to find exactly the right thing."

"Just as I thought," Twimberly said. "Sword against sword, ax against ax, pike against . . . "

"No, nothing of the sort," Alexander interrupted. "We used their own methods, you see. We just did it better."

"How? What?"

Alexander produced a spool of tape from his pocket. "Do you have a recorder?" he asked.

"Yes, of course." Beech hurried to get the machine.

"We flew over ten thousand strong," Alexander said, pride in his voice. "Trained pilots and trained crews, each ship armed with a tape similar to this one. Ten thousand strong over their cities and their villages, their hamlets and their farms. And then, with a mighty voice that could be heard throughout the land, our loudspeakers blasted forth. Over and over. Again and again. On and on. Always the same thing. They had no course but to surrender."

"For heaven's sake, man, what was it?" Beech asked. "What was this horrible thing you beamed down at them?"

Alexander put one finger alongside his nose, clicked on the recorder, and said, "Listen."

The men stood spellbound as the tape unwound. A chorus burst into the room, the voices loud and clear, the tune catchy. In a little while, Beech and Twimberly ran screaming from the room. Alexander stood by the recorder, his foot tapping lightly to the tune.

"Burpsi-Cola strikes the mark, drink it in the day or dark . . ."

THE END

personals

WANTED: O. W all '53 and earlier issues. Imagination No. 3 to 9 Will trade the following hard cover book club selections "Beyond The Barriers of Space and Time," "World Out of Mind," "Assignment in Tomorrow," "The Mixed Men," "Satellite E One," and "Wild Talent." Will trade 3 magazines for one hard cover for '52 and later issues and 2 magazines for 1 hard cover for pre '52 issues. James Burroughs, 1075 Calder Ave., Beaumont, Texas . *The editors of O. W. would like some copies of May 1955 OTHER WORLDS for office copies, as they are completely out of this issue! If you have a copy, drop us a card. . .*

WANTED: Shaver Mystery Magazine, Vol 2, No. 4 (the issue just before the experimental pink issue). Alex Saunders, 606 Gladstone Ave., Toronto, Ontario, Canada . . . 66 *mags*, '51-'55, 56 *Pb's all mint*; 10 *hard cover books, all different, all SF.* 10 *non-sf Pb's thrown in.* $10.00, *plus postage. C.O.D. Bob Guyot, Box 255, R D. No. 1, Ravena, N. Y.* . . . That's all the Personals at hand. Take advantage of this column to trade or sell your magazines, locate missing friends, make new friends, sell your mother-in-law (anything non commercial and commendable and fanable!). This is a convenience offered by O .W. to its friends. Simply write to PERSONALS, c/o OTHER WORLDS, Amherst, Wisconsin.

WANTED: Almost all pre-47 aSF's, all Unknown Worlds, most of the post-

war short-lived magazines (such as Worlds Beyond, Spaceway, etc.), all astronautical journals (such as Journal of the British Interplanetary Society, Journal of Astronautics, Jet Propulsion, Rockets, etc.), all issues of Nucleonics, Magnetic Film & Tape Recording; also Norem's "Timeless Lithuania," Senn's "The Lithuanian Language," and most other books, pamphlets, and periodicals dealing with Lithuania; also used Lithuanian postage stamps on cover, or at least on part of the original envelope; also pre 1951 Science Digests and some Scientific Americans. Will pay cash or trade. On trade, I can get for trade almost any post-47 stf mag, or earlier, but usually for a considerably higher price. Also great numbers of Pop. Sc., Pop Mc., Mcan Ill. Send list of what you have, giving name, date, condition and price. If want to trade, send on list of wanteds many second choices as all ish aren't immediately available to me.

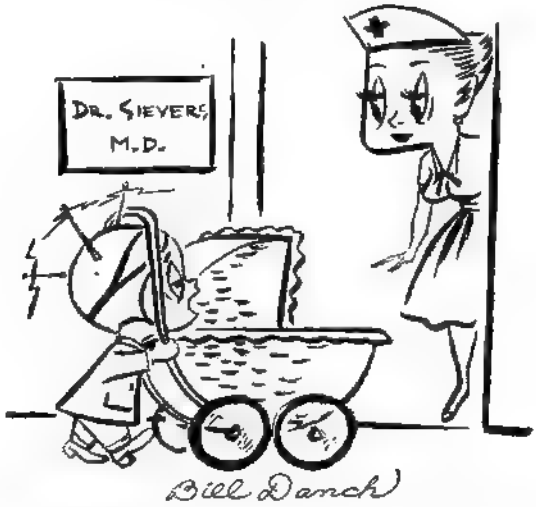
Edmund Romualdas (Meskys) Maske, 723 A 45 St., Brooklyn 20 N. Y. (Tel. GE 8-0009)

Note: Damon Knight, Judith Merril and James Blish are making tentative plans for a science fiction writers' conference to be held next summer in Milford, Pa. Milford is a small resort town about 90 miles from New York. Dates, prices & c. have not been settled, and reservations are not wanted now. What is wanted, if you are interested, is a letter telling something about yourself — experience, training, stories sold (if any), and so on. Later progress reports will go out directly to qualified people who write now. Address: Damon Knight, P. O. Box 164, Milford, Pike Co., Pa.

I wish someone would write. I've looked all over Saint Louis and can't find a fellow fan. I'm twenty. And I'm getting tired of talking to myself. I like Bradbury, Sheckley, Sturgeon and Matheson if it matters. — Robert Williams, 5831 Cabanne; St. Louis 12, Mo.

"The Dallas Futurian Society requests all fen in the Dallas area to contact Orville W. Mosher, 429 Gilpin Ave., Dallas 11, Texas."

THE END



"—I'm returning him. There are too many other things like rocket guns, space ships and so on that we really need—"

The PHANTOM MILKMAN

by Jack Vance

One thing is sure—if you order milk from the milkman, you are going to get a bill for that milk when it's been delivered —and you'd better be ready to pay for it!

I'VE had all I can stand. I've got to get out, away from the walls, the glass, the white stone, the black asphalt. All of a sudden I see the city for the terrible place that it is. Lights burn my eyes, voices crawl on my skin like sticky insects, and I notice that the people look like insects too. Burly brown beetles, wispy mosquito-men in tight black trousers, sour sow-bug women, mantids and scorpions, fat little dung-beetles, wasp-girls gliding with poisonous nicety, children like loathesome little flies. . .This isn't a pleasant thought; I must not think of people so; the picture could linger to bother me. I think I'm a hundred times more sensitive than anyone else in the world, and I'm given to very strange fancies. I could list some that would startle you, and its just as well that I don't. But I do have this frantic urge to flee the city; it's settled. I'm going.

I consult my maps -there's the Andes, the Atlas, the Altai; Mt Godwin-Austin, Mt. Kilimanjaro; Stromboli and Etna. I compare Siberia above Baikal Nor with the Pacific between Antofagasta and Easter Island. Arabia is hot; Greenland is cold. Tristan da Cunha is very remote; Bouvet even more so. There's Timbuktu, Zanzibar, Bali, the Great Australian Bight.

I am definitely leaving the city. I have found a cabin in Maple Valley, four miles west of Sunbury. It stands a hundred feet back from Maple Valley Road, under two tall trees. It has three rooms and a porch, a fireplace, a good roof, a good well and windmill

Mrs. Lipscomb is skeptical, even a little shocked. "A good-looking girl like you shouldn't go off by yourself; time to hide away when you're old and nobody wants you." She predicts hair-raising adventures, but I don't care. I was married to Poole for six weeks: nothing could happen that would be any worse.

I'm in my new house. There's lots of work ahead of me: scrubbing, chopping wood. I'll probably bulge with muscles before the winter's over

My cats are delighted. They are Homer and Moses. Homer is yellow; Moses is black and white. Which reminds me: milk. I saw a Sunbury Dairy delivery truck on the highway. I'll write them an order now

Sunbury Dairy November 14
Sunbury
Dear Sirs.

Please leave me a quart of milk three times a week on whatever days are convenient. Please bill me.

Isabel Durbrow

RFD Route 2, Box 82
Sunbury

My mailbox is battered and dusty; one day I'll paint it: red, white and blue, to cheer the mailman. He delivers at ten in the morning, in an old blue panel truck.

When I mail the letter, I see that there's already one in the box. It's for me—forwarded from the city by Mrs. Lipscomb. I take it slowly. I don't want it; I recognize the handwriting: it's from Poole, the dark-visaged brute I woke up from childhood to find myself married to. I tear it in pieces; I'm not even curious. I'm still young and very pretty, but right now there's no one I want, Poole least of all. I shall wear blue jeans and write by the fireplace all winter; and in the spring, who knows?

During the night the wind comes up; the windmill cries from the cold. I lay in bed, with Homer and Moses at my feet. The coals in the fireplace flicker . . .Tomorrow I'll write Mrs. Lipscomb; by no means must she give Poole my address.

I have written the letter. I run down the slope to the mailbox. It's a glorious late autumn day. The wind is crisp, the hills are like an ocean of gold; with scarlet and yellow trees for surf.

I pull open the mailbox . . . Now, this is odd! My letter to Sunbury Dairy —gone. Perhaps the carrier came early? But it's only nine o'clock. I put in the letter to Mrs. Lipscomb and look all around . . . Nothing. Who would want my letter? My cats stand with tails erect, looking keenly up the road, first in one direction, then the other, like surveyors planning a new highway. Well, come kittens, you'll drink canned milk today.

At ten o'clock the carrier passes, driving his dusty blue panel truck. He did not come early. That means—someone took my letter.

It's all clear; I understand every thing. I'm really rather angry. This morning I found milk on my porch—a quart, bottled by the Maple Valley Dairy. They have no right to go through my mailbox; they thought I'd never notice . . . I won't use the milk; it can sit and go sour; I'll report them to the Sunbury Dairy and the post office besides . . .

I've worked quite hard. I'm not really an athletic woman, much as I'd like to be. The pile of wood that I've chopped and sawed is quite disproportionate to the time I've spent. Homer and Moses help me not at all. They sit on the logs, wind in and out underfoot. It's time for their noon meal. I'll give them canned milk, which they detest.

On investigation I see that there's not even canned milk; the only milk in the house is that of the Maple Valley Dairy . . . Well, I'll use it, if only for a month.

I pour milk into a bowl; the cats strop their ribs on my shins.

I guess they're not hungry. Homer takes five or six laps, then draws back, making a waggish face. Moses glances up to see if I'm joking. I know my cats very well; to some extent I can understand their language. It's not all in the 'meows' and 'maroos'; there's the slope of the whiskers and set of the ear. Naturally they understand each other better than I do, but I generally get the gist.

Neither one likes his milk.

"Very well," I say severely, "you're not going to waste good milk; you won't get anymore."

They saunter across the room and sit down. Perhaps the milk is sour; if so, that's the last straw. I smell the milk, and very nice milk it smells: like hay and pasturage. Surely this isn't pasteurized milk! And I look at the cap. It says. "Maple Valley Dairy. Fresh milk. Sweet and clean, from careless cows."

I presume that 'careless' is understood in the sense of 'free from care',

rather than 'slovenly'.

Well, careless cows or not, Homer and Moses have turned up their noses. What a wonderful poem I could write, in the Edwardian manner.

Homer and Moses have turned up their noses;
They're quite disappointed with tea.
Their scones are like stones, the fish is all bones;
The milk that they've tasted, it's certainly wasted,
But they're geting no other from me.
They'll just learn to like fresh milk or do without, ungrateful little scamps.

I have been scrubbing floors and whitewashing the kitchen. No more chopping and sawing. I've ordered wood from the farmer down the road. The cabin is looking very cheerful. I have curtains at the windows, books on the mantel, sprays of autumn leaves in a big blue bottle I found in the shed.

Speaking of bottles: Tomorrow morning the milk is delivered I must put out the bottle.

Homer and Moses still won't drink Maple Valley Dairy milk . . . They look at me so wistfully when I pour it out I suppose I'll have to give in and get something else. It's lovely milk; I'd drink it myself if I liked milk.

Today I drove into Sunbury, and just for a test I brought home a bottle of Sunbury Dairy Milk. Now we'll see . . . I fill a bowl Homer and Moses are wondering almost audibly if this is the same distasteful stuff I've been serving the last week. I put down the bowl: they fall to with such gusto that milk splashes on to their whiskers and drips all over the floor. That settles it. Tonight I'll put a note in the bottle, stopping delivery from Maple Valley Dairy.

I don't understand it! I wrote very clearly. "Please deliver no more milk." Lo and behold, the driver has the gall to leave me two bottles. I certainly won't pay for it. The ineffable, unutterable nerve of the man!

Sunbury Dairy doesn't deliver up Maple Valley. I'll just buy milk with my groceries. And tonight I'll write a firm note to Maple Valley Dairy.

November 21

Dear Sirs:

Leave no more milk! I don't want it. My cats won't drink it. Here is fifty cents for the two bottles I have used.

Isabel Durbrow

I am perplexed and angry. The insolence of the people is incredible. They took the two bottles back, then left me another. And a note. It's on rough gray paper, and it reads.

"You asked for it; you are going to get it."

The note has a rather unpleasant ring to it. It certainly couldn't be a threat . . . I don't think I like these people They must deliver very early; I've never heard so much as a step.

The farmer down the road is delivering my wood. I say to him, "Mr. Gable, this Maple Valley Dairy, they have a very odd way of doing business."

'Maple Valley Dairy?" Mr. Gable looks blank. "I don't think I know them."

'Oh," I ask him, "don't you buy their milk?"

"I've got four cows of my own to milk."

"Maple Valley Dairy must be further up the road."

"I hardly think so," says Mr. Gable. "I've never heard of them."

I show him the bottle, he looks surprised, and shrugs.

Many of these country people don't travel more than a mile or two from home the whole of their lives.

Tomorrow is milk day; I believe I'll get up early and tell the driver just what I think of the situation.

It is six o'clock; very gray and cold. The milk is already on the porch. What time do they deliver, in Heaven's name?

Tomorrow is milk day again. This time I'll get up at four o'clock and wait till he arrives.

The alarm goes off. It startles me. The room is still dark. I'm warm and drowsy. For a moment I can't remember why I should get up . . . The milk, the insufferable Maple Valley Dairy. Perhaps I'll let it go till next time . . . I hear a thump on the porch. There he is now! I jump up, struggle into a bath-robe, run across the room.

I open the door. The milk is on the porch. I don't see the milk-man. I don't see the truck. I don't hear anything. How could he get away so fast? It's incredible. I find this whole matter very disturbing.

To make matters worse there's another letter from Poole in the mail. This one I read, and am sorry that I bothered. He is planning to fight the divorce. He wants to come back and live with me. He explains at great length the effect I have on him; it's conceited and parts are rather disgusting. Where have I disappeared to? He's sick of this stalling around. The letter is typical of Poole, the miserable soul in the large flamboyant body. I was never a person to him; I was an ornamental vessel into which he could spend his passion — a lump of therapic clay he could knead and pound and twist. He is a very ugly man; I was his wife all of six weeks . . . I'd hate to have him find me out here. But Mrs. Lipscomb won't tell . . .

Farmer Gable brought me another load of wood. He says he smells winter in the air. I suppose it'll snow before long. Then won't the fire feel good!

The alarm goes off. Three-thirty. I'm going to catch that milk-man if it's the last thing I do.

I crawl out on the cold floor. Homer and Moses wonder what the hell's going on. I find my slippers, my bath-room. I go to the porch.

No milk yet. Good. I'm in time. So I wait. The east is only tinged with gray; a pale moon shines on the porch. The hill across the road is tarnished silver, the trees black.

I wait . . . It is four o'clock. The moon is setting.

I wait . . . It is four-thirty.

Then five.

No milkman.

I am cold and stiff. My joints ache. I cross the room and light a fire in the wood stove. I see Homer looking at the door. I run to the window. The milk is in its usual place.

There is something very wrong here. I look up the valley, down the valley. The sky is wide and dreary. The trees stand on top of the hills like people looking out to sea. I can't believe that anyone is playing a joke on me . . . Today I'll go looking for the Maple Valley Dairy.

I haven't found it. I've driven the valley one end to the other. No one's heard of it.

I stopped the Sunbury Dairy delivery truck. He never heard of it.

The telephone book doesn't list it.

No one knows them at the post office . . . Or the police station . . . Or the feed store.

It would almost seem that there is no Maple Valley Dairy. Except for the milk that they leave on my porch three times a week.

I can't think of anything to do — except ignore them . . . It's interesting if it weren't so frightening . . . I won't move; I won't return to the city . . .

Tonight it's snowing. The flakes drift past the window, the fire roars up the flue. I've made myself a wonderful hot buttered rum. Homer and Moses sit purring. It's very cozy — except I keep looking at the window, wondering

what's watching me.

Tomorrow there'll be more milk. They can't be doing this for nothing! Could it be that — no . . . For a moment I felt a throb. Poole. He's cruel enough, and he's subtle enough, but I don't see how he could have done it.

I'm lying awake. It's early morning. I don't think the milk has come; I've heard nothing.

It's stopped snowing; there's a wonderful hush outside.

"A faint thud. The milk. I'm out of bed, but I'm terribly frightened. I force myself to the window. I've no idea what I'll see.

The milk is there; the bottle shining, white . . . Nothing else. I turn away. Back to bed. Homer and Moses look bored.

I swing back in sudden excitement; my flashlight, where is it? There'll be tracks.

I open the door. The snow is an even blanket everywhere — shimmering, glimmering, pale and clear. No tracks . . . Not a mark!

If I have any sense I'll leave Maple Valley, I'll never come back . . .

Around the neck of the bottle hangs a printed form.

I reach out into the cold.

Dear Customer:
Does our service satisfy you?
Have you any complaints?
Can we leave you any other commodities?
Just let us know; we will deliver and you will be billed.
I write on the card:

"My cats don't like your milk and I don't like you. The only thing I want you to leave is your footprints. No more milk! I won't pay for it!

Isabel Durbrow"

I can't get my car started; the battery's dead. It's snowing again. I'll wait till it stops, then hike up to Gable's for a push.

It's still snowing. Tomorrow the milk. I've asked for his footprints. Tomorrow morning . . .

I haven't slept. I'm still awake, listening. There are noises off in the woods, and windmill creaks and groans, a dismal sound.

Three o'clock. Homer and Moses jump down to the floor — two soft thuds. They pad back and forth, then jump back up on the bed. They're restless tonight. Homer is telling Moses, "I don't like this at all. We never saw stuff like this going on in the city."

Moses agrees without reservation.

I lie quiet, huddled under the blankets, listening. The snow crunches a little. Homer and Moses turn to look.

A thud. I am out of bed; I run to the door.

The milk.

I run out in my slippers.

The footprints.

There are two of them in the snow just under the milk bottle. Two footprints, the mark of two feet. Bare feet!

I yell. "You cowards! You miserable sneaks! I'm not afraid of you!"

I am though. It's easy to yell when you know that no one will answer . . . But I'm not sure . . . Suppose they do?

There is a note on the bottle. It reads:

"You ordered milk; you'll be billed. You ordered footprints; you'll be billed. On the first of the month all acounts are due and payable."

I sit in the chair by the fire.

I don't know what to do. I'm terribly scared. I don't dare to look at the window for fear of seeing a face. I don't dare to wander up into the woods.

I know I should leave. But I hate to let anyone or anything drive me away. Someone must be playing a joke on me . . . But they're not . . . I wonder how they expect me to pay; in what coin? . . . What is the value of a footprint? Of six quarts of goblin milk the cats won't drink? Today is the 30th of November.

Tomorrow is the first.

At ten o'clock the mail man drives past. I run down and beg him to help me start my car. It takes only a minute; the motor catches at once.

I drive into Sunbury and put in a long distance call, to Howard Mansfield. He's a young engineer I knew before I was married. I tell him everything in a rush. He is interested but he takes the practical viewpoint. He says he'll come tomorrow and check the situation. I think he's more interested in checking me. I don't mind; he'll behave himself if I tell him to. I do want someone here the next time the milk comes . . . Which should be the morning of the day after tomorrow.

It's clear and cool. I've recharged the battery; I've bought groceries; I drive home. The fire in the stove has gone down; I build it up and make a fire in the fireplace.

I fry two lamb chops and make a salad. I feed Homer and Moses and eat my dinner.

Now it's very quiet. The cold makes small creaking noises outside; about ten o'clock the wind starts to come up. I'm tired, but I'm too nervous to go to sleep. These are the last hours of November 30th, they're running out . . .

I hear a soft sound outside, a tap at the door. The knob turns, but the door is bolted. For some reason I look at the clock. Eleven-thirty. Not yet the first. Howard has arrived?

I slowly go to the door. I wish I had a gun.

"Who's there?" My voice sounds strange.

"It's me." I recognize the voice.

"Go away."

"Open up. Or I'll bust in."

"Go away." I'm suddenly very frightened. It's so dark and far away, how could he have found me? Mrs. Lipscomb? Or through Howard?

"I'm coming in, Isabel. Open up, or I'll tear a hole in the wall!"

"I'll shoot you . . ."

He laughs. "You wouldn't shoot me . . . I'm your husband."

The door creaks as he puts his shoulder to it. The screws pull out of old wood; the bolt snaps loose, the door bursts open.

He poses for a moment, half-smiling. He has very black hair, a sharp thin nose, pale skin. His cheeks are red with the cold. He has the look of a decadent young Roman senator, and I know he's capable of anything queer and cruel.

"Hello, honey. I've come to take you back."

I know I'm in for a long hard pull. Telling him to get out, to go away, is a waste of breath.

"Shut the door." I go back to the fire. I won't give him the satisfaction of seeing that I'm frightened.

He comes slowly across the room. Homer and Moses crouch on the bed hoping he won't notice them.

"You're pretty well hid out."

"I'm not hiding." And I wonder if after all he's behind the Maple Valley Dairy. It must be.

"Have you come to collect for the milk, Poole?" I try to speak softly, as if I've known all the time.

He looks at me half-smiling. I see he's puzzled. He pretends that he understands. "Yeah. I've been missing my cream."

I sit looking at him, trying to convey my contempt. He wants me to fear him. He knows I don't love him. Fear or love — one suits him as well as the other. Indifference he won't take.

His mouth starts to droop. It looks as if he's thinking wistful thoughts, but I know he is becoming angry.

I don't want him angry. I say, "It's almost my bed-time, Poole."

He nodded. "That's a good idea."

I say nothing.

He swings a chair around, straddles it with his arms along the back, his chin on his arms. The firelight glows on his

face.

"You're pretty cool, Isabel."

"I've no reason to be otherwise."

"You're my wife."

"No."

He jumps up, grabs my wrists, looks down into my eyes. He's playing with me. We both know what he's planning; he advances to it by easy stages.

"Poole," I say in a cool voice, "you make me sick."

He slaps my face. Not hard. Just enough to indicate that he's the master. I stare at him; I don't intend to lose control. He can kill me; I won't show fear, nothing but contempt.

He reads my mind, he takes it as a challenge; his lips droop softly. He drops my arms, sits down, grins at me. Whatever he felt when he came here, now it's hate. Because I see through his poses, past his good-looks, his black, white and rose beauty.

"The way I see it," says Poole, "you're up here playing around with two or three other men."

I blushed; I can't help it. "Think what you like."

"Maybe it's just one man."

"If he finds you here — he'll give you a beating."

He looks at me interestedly; then laughs, stretches his magnificent arms, writhes his shoulder muscles. He is proud of his physique.

"It's a good bluff, Isabel. But knowing you, your virginal mind . . ."

The clock strikes twelve. Someone taps at the door. Poole jerks around, looks at the door, then at me.

I jump to my feet. I look at the door.

"Who's that?"

"I — really don't — know." I'm not sure. But it's twelve o'clock; it's December first. Who else could it be?" It's — it's the milkman." I start for the door — slowly. Of course I don't intend to open it.

"Milkman, eh? At midnight?" He jumps up, catches my arm. "Come to collect the milk bill, I suppose."

"That's quite right." My voice sounds weird and dry.

"Maybe he'd like to collect from me."

"I'll take care of him, Poole." I try to pull away, knowing that whatever I seem to want he won't allow "Let me go"

"I'll pay your milk bill . . . After all, dear," he says silkily, "I'm your husband"

He shoves me across the room, goes to the door. I bury my face in my arms.

The door swings wide. "So you're the milkman," he says. His voice trails away. I hear a sudden gasp. I don't look.

Poole is paying the milk bill.

The door creaks slowly shut. A quick shuffle of steps on the porch, a crunching of snow.

After awhile I get up, prop a chair under the door knob, build up the fire. I sit looking at the flames. I don't go near the window.

The cold yellow dawn-sun is shining through the window. The room is cold. I build a roaring fire, put on the coffee, look around the cabin. I've put in lots of work, but I don't have much to pack. Howard is coming today. He can help me.

The sun shines bright through the window. At last—I open the door, step out on the porch. The sun is dazzling on the snow. I wonder where Poole is. There's a shuffle of prints around the door, but away from the porch the snow is pure and clean. His convertible sits in the road.

A milk bill is stuck in a bottle and it's marked, "Paid in full."

I go inside the house, where I drink coffee, pet Homer and Moses, and try to stop my hands from shaking.

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. . . Editorial . . .

(*Continued from page 5*)

size. Why? Simply because we're trying to make the magazine visible on the newsstands. Some of you liked the pocket-size better, because you can carry it on the bus; but a lot of you are telling me you like the bigger size—and mostly because there's more story-matter in it; 23 per cent more.

Second, we are trying to get the kind of stories we want. Really good stories. Frankly, we are having trouble, but we are also having success. Maybe Hal Annas' stories aren't the best being published today, but they are a step in the right direction. We have stories on hand now (mostly contributed by some very wonderful friends of ours), which enable me to say that OTHER WORLDS will be "better and better" every issue and no doubt about it! Take for instance David V. Reed's tremendous novel which we think is better than his famous "Empire of Jegga"; and S. J. Bryne's (The Metamorphs). These are stories we can already rank among the greats of science fiction. And how about Roger Arcot's "The Timeless Man," which we predict will cause a sensation? And a story by Richard S. Shaver, which demonstrates only that he has a right to the reputation for writing ability that the famous Shaver Mystery gave him, even if it isn't a "mystery," but just a darn fine science fiction novel. And what about your own editor, who has itched for years to write another novel, and is finally at work on it? Then take Don Wilcox who says: "I want to write from my heart, and you're the only guy who will let me!" What do you think will come from that? And Robert Moore Williams, who mails us his "best" stories (he firmly believes), which have been unsold because other editors were too yellow-livered, or too dull-witted, to accept? And Evelyn Martin, a newcomer, who gives us an opportunity to predict once more: you'll remember her name well, one day!

Maybe the November issue of OTHER WORLDS doesn't make too much progress in the direction we're aiming, and maybe this doesn't either. But each issue *will* progress—we'll do it or our name is mud. Yes, we're still losing money. We're financially crazy to keep OTHER WORLDS going. But we're going to finance it one way or another. A real kick in the pants will knock us out, true, but we're hoping the kick won't come. We're hoping that just a few more of our old friends find OTHER WORLDS on the stands, and line up behind us in what frankly is a crusade. That's why we're selling "Rap" as much as "science fiction". Maybe you don't care to buy, but we hope you do care. It would mean that we've said a few true things, and that we're all not "confidentially-minded." I refuse to believe that there aren't 40,000 real lovers of science fiction left who will invest 35c a month (or every two months, as long as we can't afford to bring out OTHER WORLDS monthly), in something they believe in.

Is it a foolish thing to attempt: to try to make OTHER WORLDS a ding-dong good science fiction magazine we'll all enjoy? With the help of the authors and the readers, it should be an easy goal to attain. They're much the same people who created science fiction in the first place. And those newcomers, like Evelyn Martin, are inspired by the old gang, and willing to carry on the tradition.

Have you got a friend who likes science fiction? Why not give him or her a gift subscription to OTHER WORLDS? Do you know, that would solve the problem right there! And about Tarzan—am I going to have to sit back a couple of months from now and say to myself: "Tarzan is dead, and all for lack of a dime!" Is THAT the mark he's made on the world!—*Rap.*

LAAN looked at the man called Hazos and thought how tragic it was that one so beautiful should be an outcast. Hazos had almost a woman's beauty, with long black hair tumbling over his shoulders.

Laan had thought he was a woman when he first saw Hazos standing at the bar, for Hazos' back was turned to their table. He had asked Bayp about it, because a woman standing at a ba did not fit in with the picture he wa constructing in his mind of this colonial society.

The STRANGEST MAN In The UNIVERSE

by Charles L. Fontenay

Hazos was strange, no doubt about it. They called him the "poor crazy one," but as events developed, it seemed that those who called him so were themselves the crazy ones. His deeds staggered them.

Amid the drab clothing of the Antilan colonists who crowded the town's *vunta*, or recreation hall, the bright hues of Hazos' garments were to Laan a nostalgic reminder of Earth. Alas, they were but a fool's motley.

"*Jobregun*, Earthman," Bayp was saying in the accented English which was one of his proudest accomplishments, "what would you think of a man who would stand and look at the sky and say to those who pass, '*Ahmyr!* The sky is green!'

"Of course the sky is green. We all know that many infinities of tiny planets float high in the air and make it green. You, Earthman, come from a world where the sky is blue, and we would expect to see you stare at the sky and exclaim, '*Ahmyr!* The sky is green!' But why should Hazos say it, who was born on this world?"

There must be significance behind such vehemence, Laan thought, for Bayp was secretary of the Synd, the 24-man council which ruled the small population of Antila with an iron hand. But then there was something fanatic and cruel about Bayp's dark, high-cheeked face. Laan searched his memory and thought of Earth history: the Inquisition.

Through the low arched doorway beyond the bar came the throb of guitar and tambourin The music of Antila was both passionate and wistful, bespeaking a rigidly controlled ardor and at the same time a lingering memory of happier days in a brighter homeland. To these mingled melodies, the Antilans' mode of dancing was a sort of stationery quivering, the partners barely touching hands.

Beti the ship's psychologist, and Meegl, president of the Antilan Synd came through this doorway and made their way through the crowd toward the table. Beti's short blond hair was as eye-catching among these dark people as Hazos' colored garb, even had her shimmering coveralls not marked her as one of the four who had blasted down two days earlier aboard the *Inspector*, first ship to arrive from Earth since the colonization of the planet Antila. Meegl, black-eyed, gray-haired, gray-bearded, looked like an ancient Spanish grandee.

Bayp arose at their approach and Laan belatedly realizing that was the custom here, also got to his feet.

"May I have the pleasure of dancing also *zaynreed?*" asked Bayp.

"I'm sorry, no," replied Beti, and Laan thought there was a strange note to her

voice. "I have had enough dancing for now. Besides, when I left, you were beginning to tell Laan about that strange young man in the rainbow clothing. He is so unusual here, I would like to hear about him."

"There is little more to say of him," said Bayp with a grimace as all of them sat down. "He is only Hazos, the *Boboloke*—that is to say, in your language, the poor crazy one. *Ahmyr*, if we are fortunate tonight, you shall see."

Summoning a waiter, Bayp spoke to him swiftly in Antilan, a harsh derivative of the Latin-American Spanish spoken by the planet's original settlers more than a century earlier. The waiter left and returned a few moments later with four glasses of water, Hazos at his heels.

The thing that struck Laan immediately about Hazos at close range was the unlined repose of his youthful face. His eyes were black, but they were deep, without the surface glitter of Bayp's and Meegl's eyes.

Setting the water glasses around the table, Bayp spoke to Hazos in Antilan. Hazos shook his head and turned to Laan.

"He said that you wish wine," said Hazos in perfect English. "If you wish wine, why did you not have wine brought?"

"I don't understand what this is all about," said Laan, surprised, to Bayp. "I'm afraid you Antilan was a little too fast for me."

"He is trying to embarrass me," said Bayp, his lean face darkening. "Hazos, these Earth people wish to see you transform their water."

"Why?" asked Hazos, looking at Laan.

Laan looked helplessly at Bayp.

"If it is some sort of trick you perform, would you mind doing it for us, Hazos?" asked Laan, trying to be diplomatic. Bayp was obviously in a cold rage.

"You have no reason," retorted Hazos. Turning, he walked away from them.

"It would have been better to have explained to the Earth people before," Meegl reproached Bayp gently. Meegl spoke no English but his Antilan was slower and softer than Bayp's. After several hours with the ship's semantic analyzer, Laan could understand Meegl without too much trouble.

"That Boboloke!" choked Bayp furiously.

"What's the trick about the wine?" asked Beti curiously of Meegl.

"*Ahzi*, you think it is a trick to baffle visitors?" replied Meegl, smiling. "Perhaps it is. But, if so, it is Hazos' trick. No one knows but Hazos. Had you but given him a reason, I say to you that your glasses now would be filled with wine, not water—or, at least, all of us here would have thought it wine."

"Just as well he didn't," muttered Laan, almost to himself. The *enan* wine of Antila was too strong and acid for his taste.

"Why do you call him the . . . what is it? . . . the Boboloke?" asked Beti.

"You do not know?" asked Meegl in surprise. "But then, you who travel among the stars see many kinds of people. A colony is a closely knit thing where people understand each other. It is a small canvas, with only room for the bright colors. Hazos is a creature of shifting pastels."

Not an apt comparison, thought Laan, considering the brilliance of Hazos' patchwork clothing

"That sounds as though you consider him someone different, not necessarily insane," said Beti.

"In the colony, it is the same," said Bayp harshly in Antilan. "No colony can afford someone who is whispered about and pointed at, who contributes nothing. We have no room for drones."

"Life is hard in a colony of only 10,000 people on a cold barren world," contributed Meegl apologetically.

"I'd like to study this man," said

Beti, her eyes glowing. "May I, Laan?"

"Within limits, if the authorities of the colony give you permission," replied Laan cautiously.

Meegl give her permission, hesitantly, with a word of advice about discretion of some sort which the Earth people were not able to translate exactly from the Antilan. Later, Laan had some advice of his own as they walked through the utterly black streets of Syud, Antila's only town, toward their ship, later lighting their way with flashlights.

"I couldn't say so in front of Bayp, of course," he told Beti. "But you realize that, as ship's psychologist, your primary mission here is to guide us in our relations with the colony. I'm responsible as captain, for the success of this first official expedition to the Antilan colony, and we're just beginning to get down to the real core of relations between the two worlds."

Beti smiled, wrily.

"I have a rough job, Old Man," she said, using her pet term for Laan. Although he did not look it, thanks to the advancement of Terrestrial science, the captain was 30 years her senior. "On the surface, Antila looks like cultures I've studied, but there are some factors that don't fit. I think my study of this man Hazos may prove to be a helpful supplement. Sometimes the most direct route to an understanding of a group's normal psychology is an analysis of types they consider abnormal."

Laan's most baffling problem in dealing with the Antilans was an elusive failure in communication. He was struggling to use a new language he knew only from a few sessions with the ship's semantic analyzer. Although Bayp and the other Antilans who spoke English had learned the language in their schools, he often had difficulty in understanding their usage of it.

What made things more difficult was that the Antilans had become wary on learning that the Earth people wanted something of them and were willing to give something in return. What Laan was required to take back to Earth were films and tapes of the colony's life and development, for study by the interstellar Sociological Institute. He had told the Antilan Synd this, openly and honestly and had offered anything reasonable in return, that he was able to give.

They seemed to be sounding him out, trying to get the most possible from him.

As far as he was able to determine, their greatest need was for some sort of power generating equipment.

"No longer adequate is the machinery from the two ships in which our fathers came to Antila," Meegl explained during one of the conferences. "The driving engines were converted to power production, but they have almost worn out and the needs of our people constantly press upon them."

"Fortunatély," Laan told him, "We have tapes and films aboard ship giving all the necessary details on construction of power generating equipment. They are coded, to protect our trading privileges, but I'll have my engineer build working models so you can make a choice."

It was easy to see why they considered power equipment important. Antila was a cold, dim world. Although only a few million miles from its sun, the red dwarf star Lacaille 9352, it was a planet of almost perpetual snow. The dwarf *enan* tree was the only plant that succeeded well in its stubborn soil, and from it the Antilans got the wood to build their houses and their fires, and its potato-like fruit formed the main item of their diet and the base of their bitter wine. The vegetables they had brought from Earth had to be grown under glass.

While Beti went about her task of studying the Antilans—mostly Hazos—in her own way, Laan showed his films

and ran his tapes for the Synd. Meanwhile, Vufking, the ship's engineer, and his wife, Neda, built working models of the most common generators. When they were completed, Laan had them hauled into the Syndkaz, the house of government, and staged a demonstration for the Antilans.

In the midst of the compact town of Syud, the Syndkaz was pretentious only by its bigness and by the modest dome that projected above the surrounding buildings. It was almost as big as the community recreation hall. Other than that it was of the same simple wooden construction as everything else.

In the council room, there was a certain air of grave formality that seemed to have disappeared largely from Earth. The swarthy, long-faced Antilan rulers sat stiff and straight at their thin-legged desks, arising only to crowd around the long front table when Laan unveiled his models

"No atomic power plant is represented," Laan told the gentlemen of the Synd, speaking in English and letting Bayp translate. "Because of the factor of critical mass, a working model would be a power plant in itself.

"This is a steam generator. I doubt that you will find it practical, stoking it only with *enan* wood, because you would soon strip the forests close at hand and have to go farther and farther afield. If you have coal or gas available, however, it could be utilized

"This one is a hydro-electric generator. Although I note that the river running by your city is seasonal because of the cold, you have very high daily tides that move up the river bed far beyond the city. The water could be impounded in reservoirs and used to turn your generators.

"I don't believe this last one had been perfected before the Antilan colonists left Earth. This combines hydrogen and oxygen in an electrolyte of potassium hydroxide between diaphgrams of porous nickel, to produce electrical power with an efficiency of about 75 per cent."

Bayp translated this dissertation slowly to his colleagues while Laan proudly watched his models prove themselves by lighting small bulbs.

"But of what value are these things to us?" asked Meegl at last, waving his hand at the busy little models. "They are too small."

"These are but models," explained Laan patiently in Antilan. "The films you have seen show in detail how to make the full-sized generators.

"Instruction is not enough," retorted Bayp brusquely. "We need the equipment itself from Earth."

Laan drummed his fingers thoughtfully on the table top.

"I don't suppose any of you are familiar with space travel?" he asked. "With the details and requirements of it, I mean?"

"No." said Bayp. "Meegl is the son of a first settler. The rest of us here are third generation."

"Mass, or weight, is crucial in space travel," said Laan. "To reach the 98 per cent of light speed we travel on interstellar journeys and decelerate from that speed, only one per cent of the total mass of the ship can be 'pay load' – that's why most ships carry a crew of only four. The fuel needed to haul one 300-ton generator from Earth would be about 30,000 tons."

A murmur of consternation rippled through the council

"It isn't done," Laan went on. "Interstellar trade is without exception either in small, valuable items or in knowledge that can be taped and filmed For example a dozen packets of flower seeds were traded on Baldur for the tape of a popular song which made the trader's fortune on Earth.

"Besides that, of course, is the fact that it would take fifty years, objective time, for my ship to go back to Earth and return here. No, I can trade you

knowledge—no more."

Meegl shook his gray head sadly.

"Your knowledge will do us no good," he said. "In my generation, we still had enough technicians to have duplicated the machines from the colonizing ship. But we have no metals on Antila."

Meegl had waved his hand in dismissal and the Synd meeting was breaking up before the full significance of that statement sank into Laan's mind. His thoughts in confusion as, with the help of several Antilans, he loaded the models into the cart outside to take them back to the ship.

No metals. Laan didn't know enough about electricity to be sure whether or not some substitute for wires—perhaps some sort of liquid in glass tubing—could be used to transmit power. But it was a certainty that generators couldn't be built without metal.

The revelation raised another possibility he preferred not to think about at the moment.

The wooden sidewalks of Syud were busy, with the drab matter-of-factness of an Arctic village. In and out of the huddled buildings moved the heavily cloaked colonists, scarcely pausing to glance at Laan in his light, heated coveralls. He walked at the edge of one of the sidewalks, using a long pole to guide the shaggy *alka* that pulled his cartload of useless models.

Lacaille 9352—called *Lazang* by the Antilans—was a tremendous crimson orb filling a fifth of the sky. Its feeble rays were dimmed further by the green mist the veiled it—the layer of tiny airborne planets that floated high above to compete for its warmth.

A murmur behind Laan grew into a roar of voices, and he was jostled into the side of a building by a hurrying mob of Antilans that filled the narrow street from brim to brim, churning its thin snow blanket into mud. There must have been several hundred of them. They swirled past him like the crest of a flood, leaving him and his cart as debris in their wake.

Cursing the idiosyncrasies of such a society, Laan brushed himself off, recovered his pole from the mud and prodded the stolid *alka* into motion again. Ahead of him, the rabble veered and funneled into a side street.

When he reached the mouth of the side street, he peered down it curiously as he crossed. The mass excitement was unusual for Antilans. The crowd had stopped about a hundred feet down the street and was milling around. There was a great deal of shouting. Occasional newcomers passed him at a swift walk, on their way to join the mob.

Laan crunched through the snowy mud. He had almost reached the opposite sidewalk when, from the corner of his eye, he caught a flash of yellow hair in the midst of the boiling crowd. He stopped and peered, alarmed, while the *alka* plodded on down the street, slowly, without him. He had never seen a blond Antilan . . . and if there were no blond Antilans . . .

He caught a glimpse of vari-colored clothing among the drab coats. Hazos! And Beti was supposed to be with him!

Laan headed for the turmoil at a trot, anxiously, wishing he had a heat-gun. When he was almost there, he saw that they were divided into two groups. The nearer group was gathered around Hazos, beating at him with fists and sticks. So far, he seemed to have escaped serious injury by the very fact that the crowd was pressed so tightly around him that no one had room to swing freely.

From the heart of the other surging group of Antilans, Beti's voice was raised in a shriek of terror:

"Hazos! Help me!"

She cried in pain—a cry that was cut off sharply.

Laan hit the edge of the crowd with every ounce of strength in his body. He rebounded. It was like hitting a stone

wall.

He began to claw his way into the mob, hurling Antilans aside. There was a momentary roaring in his ears that was not the sound of the crowd. He sensed a change in tenor of the babble around him, a falling and a rising in its volume, then Laan himself was the center of a close circle of dark, angry faces. They were shouting incomprehensible things at him in Antilan.

Matters had not progressed to the point of physical blows, when Bayp broke through the wall of men that surrounded Laan, beating them aside with a short, heavy stick. Angry men who turned on him when struck subsided at the sight of the red patches on his shoulders which denoted membership in the Synd. Silence, of a sort, fell when Bayp reached the center of the press and confronted Laan.

"Come," said Bayp, taking him by the arm. "I shall safeguard you through the crowd. Then it would be best for you to go at once to your ship."

"But Beti?" demanded Laan. "Where's Beti? I saw her here."

"She and the Boboloke seem to have escaped," replied Bayp, a puzzled frown crossing his face. "I don't know how they did it, but there are a dozen unconscious men being tended on the sidewalk. They seem to be badly burned. The woman and the Boboloke are no longer here, at any rate."

"What's all this about?" asked Laan as they made their day down the street. He found he was trembling from reaction.

Bayp smiled sardonically.

"On Antila, we do not consider it proper for our women to associate with men openly and brazenly in the street," he answered. "This is true especially when the man is the Boboloke. Meegl tried to warn Beti of this, but it seems that she did not listen."

Long before Laan was close enough to see Hazos' face, he recognized the Boboloke from his party-colored clothing. Laan was about a quarter of a mile from Syud, trudging through the snowy *cnan* groves, when Hazos appeared, coming from the direction of the ship. Laan broke into a run and came up to Hazos, panting.

There was a big bruise on one side of Hazos' face, and his clothing was torn. He looked at Laan with calm eyes as the Earthman grabbed him by the shoulders and gasped:

"Where's Beti, Hazos? Is she all right?"

"She is at the ship," replied Hazos quietly, in English. "Her spirit is unhappy, but her body is not harmed."

"How did you escape from that mob?"

"She was frightened," said Hazos, looking at him with clear eyes. "She is not familiar with my people. I brought her away."

Laan wasted no more time questioning Hazos. The story he got from Beti, soothing herself under a sun lamp on the center deck, was more detailed but hardly more informative.

"They came upon us suddenly," she said, shuddering. She lay on her stomach while Neda massaged her bare back with oil. "I don't know what they were going to do. They were pulling and tugging at me. I don't know what they were doing to Hazos. He was all messed up later."

"They were beating him," said Laan

"It was the strangest thing," said Beti. "I tried to reason with them, but I couldn't understand what they were shouting and I don't suppose they could understand me. I lost my head and began to yell for Hazos—as though he could help me poor fellow!

"Then they all froze, rigid, like statues. Hazos came to me and we went through the crowd, just pushing them out of our path, and came to the ship. It was very odd, that walk. Everything seemed to be so still and quiet. The sun

was even dimmer, but the sky wasn't green any more. It was all colors, like the rainbow.

"Hmmm. As a psychologist, what does that sound like to you, Beti?"

"Could be hypnosis," she replied promptly.

"Could be. But there'd have to be mass hypnosis involved, too, to get you two out of that crowd."

"That's the only explanation in the sphere of my reasoning," she said. "The question that's been bothering me is: who's responsible for it?"

"The Synd, maybe," said Laan. "We don't know what methods they use to maintain their power. They aren't an elective body. And Bayp was the fellow who pulled me out of the mess after I barged into it."

Beti grimaced.

"I don't like that man, Laan," she said. "Maybe I owe him a debt of gratitude for what happened today, but I don't like him."

"I noticed you refused to dance with him that night at the *vunta*," said Laan, grinning.

"You're not a very thorough amateur psychologist," she retorted with a short laught. "Not liking Bayp was just part of that. That movement they all dancing may look innocuous, Old Man, standing there three feet away from your partner and barely touching hands with him; but it's the most frightening voluptuous thing I've ever experienced. Even with an old man like Meegl!"

"Supper!" called Vufking from the short wave cooker across the room. "Come and get it before I feed it to the hydroponics!"

Beti switched off the sun lamp and slipped into shorts and shirt. As the four sat at their meal around the round table, Beti gave a brief outline of her study of Hazos.

"He is really very lucky," she said. "Apparently because Antila is so close to its sun, there have been several mutations in the few generations since colonization. These have been destroyed as they were discovered."

"Good and bad ones alike?" asked Vufking.

"They didn't wait to find out," she said. "It's a curious thing. Isolated as they have been, the Antilans could not have heard of Thule. But there seems to be almost a racial sense of communication among humans about such horrors."

Laan nodded soberly. He had visited Thule, the inhabitable planet of tiny Wolf 359, and had seen the barbaric monstrosities whose parents had been human.

"They don't seem to be able to decide, quite, whether Hazos is a mutant or just one of those ordinary cases of retarded mental development," said Beti. "He was normal as a small child and even established a reputation for brilliance during his first years at school.

"Then he began to get strange ideas and ask strange questions the teachers were unable to answer. He refused to take examinations."

Beti stopped and smiled reminiscently.

"Meegl told me much of this," she said. "He appears to know a great deal about Hazos' life

"It seems that when the teachers would try to give Hazos an examination, he would say: 'You know these things and I am trying to learn them. It is for me to ask the questions of you.' "

That reminded Laan of something. He told her of what Bayp had said about Hazos asking why the sky was green.

"He never was satisfied with an answer," replied Beti. "Behind each answer, he always found another question."

"Like a child," said Laan.

"Yes, like a child, except that a child eventually gives up. Hazos still asks his questions, and they infuriate people, because no one can answer them to his satisfaction.

"It was the same when they tried to establish him in a trade. At first he did well, but then . . . Well, I asked him about that. What he said was, 'Always to do the same labor, without improvement, is for the *alka*, not for the man.' A rather sophisticated logic there, but you can see just how well it goes over in a frontier community struggling for existence."

"How does he make a living, then?" asked Laan.

"I don't think he would, for himself. But he has his widowed mother to support. He has a cart and an *alka*, and he works as a carter when food and clothing run low at his house. I was walking with him as he hauled a load of *enan* wood when that mob attacked us.

"It looks, offhand, as though you're wasting your time, Beti," said Laan. "There are loafers in every society."

"Loafer? No, I don't think so, Laan." repied Beti, and her dark blue eyes glowed. "When we were walking back to the ship together, he said to me: 'You are the only one who has talked to me as a person. The others see me as a child. I am not a child. I do not see things as others see them.' "

"Well, I'm afraid Hazos and, perhaps, the socio-psychology of the whole Antilan people have become matters of academic interest for the time being," said Laan, and told them of his session with Synd.

"No metals," repeated Vufking slowly. That's bad, Laan. We left about enough mass orbiting around Antila to accelerate to 5,000 miles a second. We can't blast off the solar system on that. We'd all be dead before we traveled two light years, to say nothing of deceleration."

"The thing that worries me is that the original colonists—and, I gather, the second generation, too—had some pretty good technicians," said Laan. "Looks like they'd have found metals here if there are any."

"We have enough fuel to try another planet in the system, don't we?" asked Beti. "Surely they can't all be metalless."

They all looked at Neda, the navigator. She shook her head. "Antila's the only planet known," she said. "As dim as Lacaille 9352 is, it would take a lot better telescope than we have to find another one."

"That's your job, then, Neda," said Laan decisively. "These Antilans work pretty well in glass, and I think we can get their cooperation in building a mirror under your supervision.

"Vufking you take the grounder and start scouring this whole country around here for traces of metallic ores. Beti thinks we shouldn't use the car in the village, anyhow, because of its psychological effect on the natives. When they say 'no metals,' of course, that means no metals available near the surface, and you might be able to find an outcropping somewhere.

"Since there's nothing better for us to do, Beti and I will go on with the job of trying to deal with the Antilans and find out what makes them tick."

Vufking arose, wiping his lips, and went to his locker to get out his coveralls.

"I'm starting work this afternoon," he announced. "I hope to Taxus we're not marooned on *this* twilight planet."

Beti sat at the ship's computer, feeding it tape she had prepared from her notes on Antila's culture. Beside her on a shelf, her reference books were ready to her hand. Laan, waiting for her paced up and down the navigation deck, pausing every time he passed a port to stare out at the snowy *enan* forest around then and the tight little town of Synd not far away.

The machine clicked and blinked, and at last began to emit tape of its own. Beti picked it up as it came out and began to look up references from it in her books, clucking her tongue thoughtfully.

"You sound like the computer," said Laan impatiently. "What's the verdict?"

"I'd already guessed the general classification," she said, glancing up at him with pleased blue eyes. "That near-riot was a sure tip-off. But I wouldn't have thought of correlating their shortage of power with their fear of mutations."

"How's that? I can't think of any less likely connection than one between a power shortage and mutations."

"There isn't, except in the human mind. Don't forget, human associations spring from emotion, not logic. There's a catalyst that brings the two together very neatly in the Antilans' minds—the fear of degeneration and oblivion."

"I suppose that statement would be self-explanatory to a psychologist, with all the various human drives and motivations neatly compartmented in his mind," said Laan. "I can see some sort of a connection, but you'll have to explain to me in a little more detail just how it gives any clue to their general culture."

"Start with their origin," said Beti. "They come of a proud people. Don't forget that during the century and a half of its alliance with Brazil, Panamerica stood side by side with North Atlantica, Sinorussia and Pakindia as one of the world's great nations.

"Despite the formation of the Earth Council for greater efficiency in interstellar operations, nationalist Panamerican traditions were still strong among these people's ancestors when they blasted off to colonize Antila about a century ago. As much star-hopping as you've done, Laan, you should be old enough to remember what the widespread conception of a new star colony was then."

Laan did some quick mental mathematics.

"Let's see, I'm 52 years old, subjective time," he said, thinking out loud. "A century, Earth time . . . . that should be about the time I was on my first interstellar hop, as a navigator to Centaurus."

"You remember things I studied in history, then. Everybody thought that, with scientific techniques, a colony on the planet of another star would be a little antiseptic heaven. What they overlooked was that a starship can't take along extensive laboratories and big industrial plants.

"Disillusionment must have hit all the colonies, but especially one like Antila where they discovered they didn't have the means to generate power and build their own industries. They looked for another ship from Earth until it must have seemed to them that the mother planet had abandoned them.

"In the midst of this losing struggle to preserve a materio-technical civilization, think what the effect must have been when those first mutations appeared — and, remember, we don't know how bad they were. The search for some means to generate power then became only one front in the fight against retrogression to savagery. The mutations were a more terrifying threat, in an area that's extremely vulnerable emotionally.

"You see why the Antilan society is one of rigid conformity? Why they confine their women closely, and the free-and-easy association of an Earth woman with one of their black sheep arouses their worst passions? Why they welcome us as people from Earth, but are still suspicious of us as strangers and *different?*"

"That's a first magnitude analysis, Beti," complimented Laan with quiet pride. "Now if you can chart me an orbit in dealing with the Antilans, I'll guarantee you a jump in rating when we get back to Earth."

Beti arose and changed her shorts and shirt for coveralls.

"Let's go into Syud," she said. "I want to look over Neda's place."

The Antilans, as anxious to find metal as the Earth people, had agreed readily to cooperate with Neda. A small restau-

rant had been dismantled to give her an office near the town's glass works, at the edge of Syud, and several of the factory's workers had been assigned to serve under her supervision in making a large telescope mirror.

Neda was alone, doodling disconsolately at her desk near the center of the small rectangular room, when Laan and Beti arrived.

"I'm afraid I've bad news, Laan," said Neda. "The facilities they have here are pretty good for a small colony — without metals, they use a lot of glass. But, even so, it's going to take several years to perfect a satisfactory mirror of any size."

"Keep at it, Neda," he advised. "There's nothing more important you can do now, and that telescope is our only hope if Vufking isn't successful. So far he hasn't had any luck."

"We have no guarantee there is another planet, you know," reminded Neda gloomily. "The mass of Lacaille 9352 is pretty small, compared to Sol."

Laan stared curiously at Beti, who was inspecting the room like a ranging hound, testing the two windows and looking over the walls and ceiling calculatingly.

"With just that desk, could you get along with just the front third of this room Neda?" Beti asked.

"Why, I think so, Beti."

"What's up?" Laan asked Beti.

"Experiment," she answered. "I think I've unravelled the mystery of Hazos."

"By Sirius, I thought you'd given him up after being mobbed," exclaimed Laan, somewhat exasperated. "You have a more important job to do."

Beti stopped her prowling and faced him.

"You want cooperation from the Antilans, don't you?" she asked calmly

"Got to have it," he agreed." "You're well aware, Beti, that Vufking's looking for a needle in a haystack. The Antilans have a century of exploration of this area behind them, and if they'd help us look for metal, with our instruments, instead of sticking to Syud and shaking their heads and saying, 'There isn't any' . . . . well, if they don't, I'm afraid we're marooned on Antila, at least until Neda can begin astronomical observations."

"Let me do it my way, then, Old Man," she said. "I'm going to hit these Antilans in their weakest spot. You know how a conformist society is: the range of conformity gets narrower and narrower until the society collapses, unless resistance is strong enough to reverse the trend.

"They're half convinced Hazos is a mutant, but they're only half convinced. I'm convinced he's not. If I can prove to them he's not, I'll get you your cooperation."

"I don't see . . . ." began Laan.

"Certainly you don't. You're not a psychologist."

"I think you're wasting your time," objected Laan stubbornly. "Hazos won't cooperate in your experiment."

"You're wrong," she said positively. "Hazos thinks I understand him as no one else does. Perhaps so. But there is an Antilan proverb: '*Enavek kanfer bragizkay ez zayketat.*' — In love, with the seeing, there must be a blindness."'

"Love?" repeated Laan quietly. His heart sank a little, for Beti had endeared herself to him since he had known her. "That's the way it is?"

"Not necessarily," answered Beti too quickly, turning pink. "Or, to be honest, I should say I don't know for sure. What I was trying to say is hard to express. I do seem to understand Hazos with my heart, though what he says often doesn't make sense to my mind. Sometimes I feel I'm suspended betwen two worlds, the world of Hazos and the world of other people. They're very different, and I don't know at times which is real."

"So?"

"So I've told Hazos he must come into the world of other people, because other

people won't leave it for his. You see, my analysis of him is that he lacks ordinary human motivations. He was disoriented somewhere in his youth, and has been travelling mentally along a diverging path from his fellow men ever since."

"A very prosaic analysis," remarked Laan drily, "which doesn't fit in at all with what you just said about your own feelings."

"I told you my feelings and my mind don't cooperate very well in this," replied Beti with a strange little smile. "But, no matter what my heart says, my mind is a psychologist's mind and I must follow it. I want to convert the back of this room into a sound proof booth. I plan to install some discs, put Hazos under hypnosis and give him a run of tapes and films I've put together, based on his own emotional background. It's a system they were testing in the Psych Center in Nuyork before we left Earth, and it should work."

"Tapes and films on Hazos' background," said Laan slowly, the back of his neck beginning to get warm. "I've been trying to get permission for tapes and films on Antila since we've been here, without success. And I find that you, the ship's psychologist, have been making tapes and films—not on our primary assignment, but on your personal project, this Hazos!"

Beti's pink deepened to crimson.

"I didn't have permission to take these," she said in a small voice. "Meegl helped me take them—secretly."

"Meegl?" exclaimed Laan. "The president of the Synd?"

"He's president, but Bayp actually controls the Synd," explained Beti. "The controlling bloc thinks Meegl is too old-fashioned and has too soft a policy toward mutants. He doesn't have many supporters left in the Synd.

There's another good reason why Meegl couldn't afford to help me publicly. Very few Antilans know it, but Meegl is Hazos' father."

Laan moodily walked beside the Antilan sea, which now, at high tide, was no more than a quarter of a mile from the edge of the town. The great swells swept westward with tremendous force, following the pull of the huge sun that sparkled crimson from their peaks. The thunderous roar of upward-rushing water sounded from the narrowing mouth of the river a mile away.

Beti obviously had formed a strong emotional attachment to Hazos, whether or not she admitted it to herself.

"He's easy on my heart," she had explained to Laan in the companionable darkness of lights-out aboard the *Inspector*. "Hazos is a guileless man. When I'm with him, I don't feel that I have to pretend."

Laan had not protested, and now he told himself he should not feel so downcast about it. Despite his happy association with Beti during the four subjective years of the journey from Earth, Laan had always anticipated that she would some time find love with a younger man. But he had not expected it on her first interstellar trip—and, too, a queer character like Hazos!

Hoping morosely for Beti's sake that she was not allowing her emotions to influence her optimistic analysis of Hazos, Laan turned his steps back toward Syud. Beti had completed her hypnotherapy chamber and, with Meegl's help, had secretly arranged to power it with some of Antila's precious current. This was the day of the test.

What he should be worrying about, Laan thought as he plodded townward through the four-inch snow, was Antila's power predicament. Up on the river, giant water wheels converted the movement of the tides into direct mechanical power. But without wires and metal for new generators and transmission lines, the colony's electricity supply depended solely on the deteriorating ion-engines of their century-old starships.

Vufking was ranging farther and far-

ther afield in his search. Recently, instead of returning to the ship at the end of each day, he was sleeping in the ground-car and reporting nightly by radio. The story was always the same—no reaction from the instruments. If Antila had metals and it was inconceivable that a planet so big should not, they were buried beneath hundreds of feet of granite, limestone and loess. Antila apparently had not experienced a geological revolution in millennia.

Beti, the only member of the crew not trained in the theory of the ship's engines, had had some difficulty understanding how the Antilans were able to use their antique ion engines for power generation, yet the *Inspector* could not use its modern ones for space flight, without metals. Laan had explained to her that the engines could be converted to use stone and other materials as fuel, but on such fuel they were not efficient enough to boost a ship to near the tremendous speed of light in anything less than a normal human lifetime

Hazos and Meegl were already at Neda's office, with Beti and Neda, when Laan entered, stamping the snow from his boots.

Stretching across the room, a heavy curtain of glass fiber concealed the rotating discs that would put Hazos in a hypnotic trance and the projectors and amplifiers that would bombard him with scenes and sounds aimed at re-orienting key emotional peaks in his past life. It occurred to Laan that this was a daring thing for Beti to try, with so sketchy a knowledge of the social mileau that formed Hazos' environment.

"We've been waiting for you, Laan," said Beti. Her face was pale and tense. "Are you ready now, Hazos?"

"I do not wish this," answered Hazos gravely. "I do not think the reason for it is adequate. I do it only because you, Beti, ask it of me."

Beti turned her face away from him, and Laan saw she was on the verge of tears. Then her jaw tightened in determination and she took Hazos by the arm to guide him firmly behind the curtain. Carefully she fastened the curtain and threw a series of switches on the wall. They could hear no sound from the enclosed chamber, but they felt the vibration of Beti's machinery.

"*Fakandu Tuz,* my son" murmured Meegl belatedly: "God go with you."

Tears were on Beti's cheeks when she turned back to Laan.

"Have I done wrong, Laan?" she asked piteously. "I had to do it, didn't I?"

"Sirius, Beti! Why is everybody so mournful?" he demanded. "You've planned this for a long time, you knew what you were doing, and now you act as though you're sending him to his death."

"It could be worse than that," she answered unhappily. "I didn't tell you about the risk. You see, Hazos is oriented differently from others now, but he's sane. If I've miscalculated his ability to readjust to normal concepts or if I've applied emotonal strain at the wrong points in my tapes and films, this could unhinge his mind completely. If only the method had been more thoroughly tested before we left Earth!"

Laan understood.

"And the last state of the man was seven times worse than the first," he quoted, almost to himself.

An hour, two hours, two hours and a half, they sat waiting, saying little, as at a wake. Behind the curtain, Laan knew, strange pictures were flashing on the screens and strange sounds were roaring from the amplifiers, tearing at the hypnosis-gripped mind of Hazos. And perhaps, where no one could hear, the Boboloke was screaming . . . . .

Beti seemed to be holding her breath, her eyes clinging to the slowly creeping minute hand of her watch, as her tapes and films neared their scheduled end. She arose and went to the switches, waiting with her hand on them.

The door of the place was thrown open with a crash that brought them all, startled to their feet. Bayp strode in, followed by a half dozen Antilan men. They carried in their hands the outmoded heat-guns of a century earlier

"Ahzi, Meegl," said Bayp in Antilan, cruel satisfaction underlying his tone. "It is not for me to be surprised that you are found in the midst of this degradation and treachery, *zayner."*

The bearded Synd president answered him calmly, but his black eyes snapped angrily.

"Treason is a dangerous charge to make within the Synd," said Meegl. "It would be well for you to consider carefully before you move too far, *Zayner* Bayp."

"This is not the Synd, *zayner,"* replied Bayp, using the formal term of address mockingly. "What will the members of the Synd say when they find you have conspired with Earthlings to withhold from Antila the knowledge that could free us from the curse of our world? What will they say when they know you conspired with Earthlings to give that knowledge to an irresponsible mutant, the crazy-headed son you fathered in secret, so that he could use it to usurp the benevolent rule of the Synd?"

"You speak with the stupid tongue of an *alka,"* retorted Meegl scornfully. "This thing you have said it not true, as the Synd will know when Hazos stands before it, not the Boboloke, but, because of what we have done here, a man among the men of Antila."

"But the Boboloke will not appear before the Synd of Antila," said Bayp. "Instead, the Synd will hear how I forestalled your treacherous plot, thanks to the patriotism of those workmen who became suspicious that so much valuable power was to be channelled into a small room for the use of a lovesick woman. *Kem el Boboloke!"*

At his sharp word of command, the men with him swung their heat-guns on the curtain and a half dozen triggers clicking as one told that the invisible beams battered at the glass fiber barrier.

"No!" cried Beti in anguish, springing forward. But Bayp seized her by the arm and hurled her back to the front of the room, keeping his own heat-gun trained on Meegl, Laan and Neda.

"I have more pleasant plans for you, *zaynreed,"* he said softly. "Only the Boboloke burns this day."

The curtain glowed red and peeled away, a fading mist of ashes, and in the smoke that rolled from behind it only the melting outlines of Beti's equipment could be dimly seen. Neither Hazos nor any other man could have lived in that inferno.

As the heat beams clicked off and the pistols dropped to the sides of Bayp's gunmen, the billowing smoke forced all of them back toward the door. Then they saw flames lick forth in the rear of the room as the tough *enan* wood of the walls and ceiling caught at last from the terrific heat.

"Call the fire carts!" shouted Bayp as they stumbled through the door into the biting cold. "The rest of you take these Earthlings to their new quarters, and make sure that the fourth one is taken before he reaches their ship!"

"By Sirius, what is this?" demanded Laan angrily, struggling in the grip of two Antilans. "Do you dare attack official representatives of Earth?"

"Your status has just changed, *Zayner* Laan," answered Bayp with a sardonic smile. "Welcome, new colonists of Antila!"

Laan stared moodily into the earthen fireplace, where the *enan* logs burned green and orange. Beti stood at the window, gazing in woebegone silence at the snowstorm that raged outside. Neda, least disturbed of the three at their enforced confinement, hummed softly to herself as she sketched at plans for her telescope at a small table in the corner. The twilight

dimness of the day was relieved in the room only by the firelight and the flickering illumination of a torch attached to the wall over Neda's head.

Their makeshift prison had only two rooms. This one, containing the fireplace, was the room in which the two women slept, and they utilized it for daytime living quarters because it was warmer. The chill never quite left Laan's adjoining room.

There was no hope of escape. The single outside door to the building was kept barred and the Synd kept armed guards outside. They did not know where Meegl was. They assumed he was free, but they had not seen him since their imprisonment by Bayp four days earlier.

"Vufking is still free," said Neda. "I'm sure he'll think of some way to get us out. I remember on Thule . . . ."

"This is different," said Laan. "These Antilans know how to use heat-guns, and the weapons Vufking has in the groundcar can't match the ship's armament. He'll be running low on food now. It's just a matter of time before they get him, too."

He stared into the fire, restlessly.

"Beti, if you'd only snap out of it and help us try to work out some sort of plan," he said at last. "Hazos is dead and you might as well forget him. We need your help. You know the way these Antilans think better than anyone else."

She turned from the window.

"Oh, yes, I know the way they think," she said bitterly. "I suppose you think you know why we're held prisoner, Laan?"

"No secret about it," he answered. "They're going to dismantle the ship and add its equipment to their power generating supply. They'll turn us loose then, I suppose, when we can't take that away from them. They've got the idea they can confiscate every ship that blasts down from now on."

"You can't blame them too much," said Neda. "They asked us for help in their need, and we failed them. Maybe, if I can go on with my telescope, we'll find another planet in the system . . . ."

"You'd better ask Vufking how much easier it is to take a ship apart than to put it back together again," interrupted Beti. "Besides, that's only half of why they won't let us go again."

"What do you mean?" asked Laan.

"Bayp told me yesterday when he had me out of here for an hour," she said. "Laan, he wasn't joking when he called us new colonists. To them, we're fresh pure blood from Earth. They're planning to pour our genes into the colony's lifestream to halt what they think is the deterioration of their stock!"

Laan was momentarily shocked. But he had the philosophic nature that was required to captain starships over long interstellar hops.

"Well, Beti, you knew when you signed on for interstellar service you might be stranded somewhere in another system some time," he said with a shrug. "I realize Hazos' death has hit you pretty hard right now, but the four of us got along all right on the hop from Earth. I see no reason why we can't adjust to Antila."

"You underestimate the depth of their fear," she retorted, almost scornfully. "They're going to split us up, spread us as thin as they can, within the rigid structure of their mores. Bayp took me away from here yesterday to have me measured for a wedding gown."

"Wedding gown!" exclaimed Laan and Neda together.

"The banns have been cried all over Syud," said Beti. "Bayp's picked me for himself. I hope the rest of you have better luck."

Another day passed without change in their prison. They had no way of knowing whether Vufking had been captured, and when Bayp came in early the next afternon Laan feared the triumphant expression on the Antilan's face meant that

he had. But Bayp came for something other than gloating.

"Your engineer will come to us before he accepts starvation," said Bayp in answer to Laan's question. "You, happy new colonists of Antila, are to be released today to participate in a dual celebration."

Hope coursed through Laan's heart. Bayp laughed, interpreting Laan's expression.

"Only an *alka* would be so foolish as to think seriously of utilizing this privilege to see the freedom you desire," said Bayp. "The guards of the Synd will not kill such valuable additions to the col-

ony, of course. But I assure you that, in the event of an unwise move, you will be burned badly enough to spend some time in the hospital."

"You take stern measures to make sure your guests attend your celebrations, don't you, Bayp?" said Laan drily.

"And why not, *sayner?*" Bayp was in high good humor. "We shall have a brief but happy wedding in the Syndkaz, your bright-haired one and I. That is the first celebration. Then you will see the gaiety of a real Antilan *vezda* when all our people repair to your starship to begin dismantling it, amid much eating and drinking of *enan* wine."

Except for the motley garments Hazos had worn, Laan had never seen so much color on Antila. In a room of Bayp's spacious home, he was required to dress in a formal suit of sky blue, trimmed with gold piping and frilly lace. Neda was attired in an elaborate gown of rose and green, and together they rode in an *aika*-drawn cart to the Syndkaz. The guards who marched beside them were resplendant in red and gold uniforms.

The meeting hall of the Syndkaz was like a kaleidoscope with the colorful formal dress of Syud's aristocracy. It hummed with excited conversation.

The music here was not the mournful music they had heard at the *vunta*. In these full notes, the passions were no longer submerged, but flaunted themselves in rich, colorful chords. If an undertone of nostalgia remained, it was in the memories the melodies evoked of orange groves, spiced breezes and distant blue mountains the Antilans would never see again.

They did not see Beti until she was led up the aisle by a gorgeously dressed, sardonically triumphant Bayp. She wore the traditional wedding gown of Earth, film upon film of lacy white, a veil covering her bright hair. There were no flowers.

To Laan's profound surprise, it was Meegl who stood at the front of the room, tall and dignified in somber gray, a book in his hand, awaiting the bridal couple. He supposed, however, that the Synd president could hardly refuse to perform the ceremony.

Bayp and Beti reached the spot in front of Meegl, and Bayp bowed low and formally.

"President of the Synd," said Bayp sonorously in Antilan, "I Bayp t'Pykazoydond, citizen of Syud, come before you escorting the woman who will become my bride. In the name of our ancestors from Earth, I adjure you: perform the marriage ceremony!"

Meegl looked out over the wedding guests, his black eyes somber. He raised his hand slowly, and spoke one word into the silence.

"Hazos!" he said, loudly and clearly.

For a moment, as the amazement seeped into him, Laan was aware of no change around him. Then, when Beti moved, he realized that no one else did. Meegl stood frozen, his hand upraised. Bayp was like a statue. All around him the Antilans stood immovable, their expressions changeless.

Neda gripped Laan's arm. From the immobile crowd, impossibly, Hazos walked and strode up the aisle toward Beti.

She turned. She saw him. She fainted, sinking to the floor in a whisper of white.

Hazos picked her up in his arms, and bore her down the aisle.

"Follow me," he said to Laan and Neda. There was an alertness, an awareness, in his dark eyes that Laan had not seen there before. Do not run, or you will be burned as badly as with a heat-gun."

The starship *Inspector*, with a full crew and one passenger aboard, rose slowly and smoothly through the chill atmosphere. Below, the colonial town of Syud was only a dark spot on the crimson-tinged snow, beside the gray of the sea. No sound vibrated through the ship, for its engines were not operating.

"Beti's hypnotherapy worked as she planned it would," Hazos explained to the other four as they sat on the control deck. "I was sitting there, dazed and trying to assimilate the change after the tapes and films had stopped, when Bayp's men started raying the place. The curtain shielded me long enough to realize my danger and get out of there.

"It's quite a shock to have the entire direction of one's thinking changed. That is why I went to the home of my father, Meegl, and stayed there in meditation until it was necessary to act if you were to be saved."

"Reverse blast there for a minute, Hazos," interrupted Laan. "You say you got out of the hypnotherapy chamber, and you obviously did, but there was no exit except through the front of the room, where we were standing. How?"

"I could have made my own door, but I walked through your group without your seeing me," replied Hazos with a smile. "I did it the same way we walked out of the Syndkaz without being stopped. It is merely a speed-up in the metabolism and perceptive functions which, in effect,. slows down the passage of time. Despite our leisurely pace, it actually took us only two or three minutes to walk from the Syndkaz through Syud and to the ship. Meegl Bayp and all the others at the Syndkaz lived that two minutes at normal speed, and it must have seemed to them that the three of you just disappeared from their midst."

Understanding dawned in Beti's blue eyes. She was sitting close to Hazos, holding his hand tightly.

"Then that was the way you rescued us from the mob that day?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Hazos. "These things I have been able to do for many years, but it is only now that I understand why and when I should do them."

"You still haven't explained things to me," said the practical Vufking. His life had been spent in the midst of machines, where a cause led to an understandable effect. Vufking had been called in to the ship by radio upon their arrival, and the raging Antilans, somehow, had been unable to pass some invisible barrier to reach either—the racing groundcar or the ship. "You have some mental power that speeds up the time sense?"

Hazos gazed at him with keen black eyes

"Mental power?" he repeated slowly. "Perhaps. I suppose you could say it is mental power that causes us to be able to use our feet to walk or use our fingers to tie a complicated knot in a string.

"It is mental in that my mind directs the use of energy. No, Vufking, it is not a mysterious 'space warp.' It is as I have said: it is a matter of speeding up the metabolism. I can do it for myself, I can do it for people around me— even some distance away."

"There must be more to it than that," protested Laan.

"Somehow, you kept the Antilans away from the ship when Vufking was coming in . . . . . and I don't think you'll try to tell me you're raising the ship off Antila without engines by speeding up *its* metabolism!"

Hazos was silent for a moment, thinking deeply. Beti watched his face with shining eyes

"Look at it like this," said Hazos at last. "Our bodies are machines which utilize energy to perform tasks under the direction of our minds. When we need a task performed which is beyond the capacity of our bodies, we build a machine which uses more energy to perform that task. Our bodies do not use very much of the energy available to them from sunlight, and what they use they derive indirectly, through chemical reactions.

"How I do it, I do not know . . . . none of you could do it, nor anyone else on Antila . . . . but I can utilize the sunlight and other radiation that falls upon my body, not several steps removed

but directly, with great efficiency.

"What I do I can do without the intermediate step of a machine. I can speed or slow the metabolism of the body, I can erect a force barrier against my enemies, I can drive this ship upward by directing a stream of energy downward from it. I can even transmute elements!"

They stared at him. Beti drew away from him momentarily, her expression tinged with horror.

"Then you are a mutant after all!" she exclaimed.

Then the fear faded from her eyes and she put her arms around Hazos' neck.

"But it is a good mutation," she murmured. "You are not a monster. Hazos. You are *homo superior!*"

"By Sirius!" exclaimed Laan. "What the Earth biologists won't give to get a look at you, Hazos!"

Hazos and Beti looked at each other, than at Laan. Beti's face wore a strange look, and it was she who spoke.

"Hazos is not going to Earth, Laan," she said. "And I'm staying on Antila with him."

"That is true, Laan," said Hazos. "I wished to be with you only long enough to explain that you need have no worry about fuel to take you back. I told you I could transmute elements, and while the ship has been rising I have been working. When you reach the fuel supply you left in orbit, there will be enough additional fuel for your return journey: heavy metal built up from the elements of Antila's atmosphere."

Laan was taken aback. But after a moment he shrugged.

"Naturally, you would want to remain here and help your people," he said. "You certainly can protect yourself and Beti against them now, and with your talents they can forget their worries about power generation."

Hazos' dark eyes grew hard.

"I will answer you, *sayner* by asking Beti a question," he said in a curiously subdued voice. "What happens to a useful mutation when the environment is favorable for the normal strain?"

"Why, the mutation remains submerged until the environment becomes unfavorable to the norm," she replied. "The mutant gene is too outnumbered by the normal gene to predominate until the environment begins to weed out the normal gene."

"Antila will receive no help from me," said Hazos in a flat, bitter tone. "Before I realized what I am, I was a joke to them, a clown in motley, even something to some which should be spurned and destroyed. *Ahben.* They chose their environment, and I, Hazos, evolved to conquer it. Let them fight their losing battle with the dark and cold, while the children of Hazos thrive!"

Laan gazed at him in astonishment. Then his eyes turned to Beti.

"Beti, knowing this, do you still intend to stay here with this man?" he demanded.

"Yes, Laan," she said. "Knowing me as well as you do, you understand that I hope to soothe his bitterness and change his outlook. After all, he's still suffering from the shock of reorientation. If I don't . . . . well, the next ship from Earth may find me the mother of a new race."

She arose and kissed Laan, softly and affectionately. She embraced Vufking and Neda.

"Goodbye, my good friends," she said, with tears in her eyes. "I love you very much, but I have chosen my man, and I have chosen his world, for myself."

Without Laan's touching the controls, the ship's ion engines cut in with a muted roar and the *Inspector* surged upward under 2-G acceleration. Then Beti and Hazos were gone from their sight. Laan knew that, by some strange means of transport, they were back on the snow-covered ground of Antila, perhaps waving farewell to a metal mote that faded

high in the green sky into the crimson aura of Lacaille 9352.

There was work to be done, work familiar from years aspace. Laan's practiced fingers played on the control board like an organ.

"Vufking, check the fuel clamps and prepare to take fuel aboard," he ordered crisply. "Neda, plot us a course for Sol."

His shoulders slumped a little as he thought of the lonely light years that lay ahead. Consciously, he straightened them.

There'll be another bright young psychologist ready to ship out when we reach Earth," he muttered, half aloud.

Another thought struck him.

"By Sirius, Vufking," he said into the intercom, although the engineer would not yet have reached the lowest deck, "if this man Hazos can pull stunts like that with the energy of a dying red dwarf star, think what he could accomplish with Sol to draw on!"

It was Neda who answered.

"We may live to find out," she said prophetically.

THE END

Dear Mr. Palmer:

We regret to inform you of an error made on your part in the November 1955 issue of OTHER WORLDS.

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Ron Smith
611 West 114th, Apt. 3-D-310
New York 25, N. Y.

Gee, Joe, we just didn't notice the copyright notice! So, we humbly apologize, and as you can see, we got it into the very first issue available. Words cannot express how sorry we are. Legal things always scare hell out of us. Just the thought of appearing before a judge and being forced to pony up makes us feel faint. So, we also make haste to redress Joe (nominally, we admit, as this is dirt cheap for an article by Gibson—by whom we haven't had a novel to publish in ages!) Also we owe you a great debt we can never repay, and that is warning us before we had copyrighted OW. Now we can omit the Gibson part, and save our skins. We're sure Hal Annas and all the rest of the boys owe you an immense debt too, as their copyright would have been nullified (the injustice of it!) by this ghastly error. But you have driven home a very true point I've always maintained—the copyright laws are the screwiest things!

Consider this—it is really OW that owns the rights to Hal Annas' story, not him! For instance, if we are real mean, we could refuse to release the copyright if he should happen to sell for the sum of fifty grand to the movies. Incredible, but true.

It takes a legal eagle to tie up all the possibilities, before they'll buy, and sometimes they won't bother—cheaper to have their own man write a brand new steal of the idea. I remember a sale I once had to the movies. It was regretfully returned to me because "the copyright wasn't clear." It had been copyrighted by a reprint magazine. Can you tie that! So you see, we owe you a lot. For which, thanks!

Rap.

LETTERS

Dear Rap:

Boy, you finally got on the right track! Most of the last few issues of Universe and O. W. weren't even readable, but the Sept. issue is downright good! "Eighth Day" was a really fine story. Let's have more of M. J. Nuttall's work.

The editorial was wonderful. I agree with you 100%.

OTHER WORLDS really stands out at the newsstand. I always did like bright colors. While you're reprinting covers, why don't you reprint the one used on the issue in which the first part of "Power Metal" appeared? While you're at it, reprint "Power Metal."

James Burroughs,
1075 Caldes Ave.
Beaumont, Texas

This issue is the last of our "reprint" covers. Next issue, we'll have an original cover. Well, maybe we ought to modify that—we'll reprint the two Finlay covers in full color; and we'll probably use reprints on the back cover for a short time.

Dear Ed:

Most S. F. Mags getting mediocre to just plain lousy. Your Sept. issue of O. W. is the very best. Every story was better than the last, especially "Proof Load," and "Eighth Day." Thanks for a diamond in the present-day rough.

Wm. L. Cobb,
Lubbock, Texas

Looks like they love us down in Texas!

Dear Mr. Palmer:

Just finished reading your September issue, and I have a suggestion: don't mix your beer and editorials. The remarks about wlh and IMAGINATION were Crude, Rude, and Uncouth. In addition, they sound very stupid to anyone who reads MADGE regularly.

I liked the colors on your cover— that is, what small part of it didn't rub off on my hands. You've heard of a green thumb?

Your stories ranged from what would be classified as "average" if it appeared in MADGE (Eighth Day) down through stuff which would never appear in an interesting magazine like MADGE. (All the rest of the stories.)

Your features are always interesting, particularly the editorial, which I love to sneer at because it's so sneerable.

Jeremy Millett
1446 Garden St.
Park Ridge, Ill.

Maybe you just don't know the Palmer-Hamling history? For many long years we've been buddy-buddy, and this drubbing we give each other is our way of having a little action in this dull world. Bill always puts out a better magazine when I needle him. I've learned this, ever since he worked for me at Ziff-Davis. Incidentally, I bought his first story and a few million more words! I played cupid and got him married— and what a wonderful marriage it turned out to be! I really love that guy— but darned if I'll ever tell him so—the rat! He insists on having his steaks burned black, and I hate burned steak! But he has such a winsome personality, he always gets his way!

But really you'd be surprised at the results my little "crude, rude, uncouth" handling of Bill got. Have you noticed his latest issues? Real nice! I'm out to make stf the wonderful thing it once was, and I've gotten Howard Browne, and Bill Hamling, my two old friends and fellow-workers to pitch in with me, and so far, they have the best of me! But the old "sneertorial" writer intends to wipe that sneer offen your face, Jeremy— and

make you love O. W. We're gonna give it the old college try. And okay, we'll say nice tender things about Bill from now on. Really, he's a wonderful guy!—Rap.

Dear Rap:

About that cover — I'm glad to see it in color, but if they're going to be reprints why can't they be reprints of the various covers presented in black and white on Universe? This means the Malcolm Smith and the McCauley as well as the Finlays! I don't like the format, it makes the painting too small; this isn't so bad while you're having reprints, but I hope its changed before you start having originals.

Get that inane "Issue No. 13" off the spine and contents page, it's playing hob with my collection!

The new OW is sure off to a good start. First the excellent *Gift of Zar* by D. C. Reese (was he discovered through that contest?); then comes issue 33 (why was it called No. 12) and GOZ is equaled by Narkeeta (get more by Evelyn Martin). Finally comes Eighth Day by M. J. Nuttall with a story better than either of the previous ones named (where was Nuttall discovered, through that same contest or the ever-faithful slush pile?

Ray, the stories this issue were great. How can you get the best stories published (my opinion based on three years of reading everything published and including some thousand odd back issues which I'm still in the process of collecting) for a half cent a word? The stories in this issue were really good, but only Eando Binder was familiar (and how!) I suspect some of the other are fans and some are pen names.

Ray, tell Rog that you'll buy whatever he writes if it's good. Get him out of that depressed mood and back into the writing field; he's too good to stop at this early stage.

As for you, keep writing, and don't worry about lengths, you're good in any length. As witness: *Jonah and the Venus Whale* was terrific — I chuckled my way all the way through it; and *Big Brother* was just as good. Your novels are still considered classics in the vicinity of ZD, even though such material as *Black World, Doorway to Hell,* the Martin Brand series, etc were under pen names.

Say, you mention S. J. Byrne how about getting some novelets from him comparable to *The Bridge* which was one of the best stories to come from the pages of Science Stories.

Please call your next issue 35 so I can put it on the shelf with the rest of my OW without a rueful expression on my face.

Another thing, it seems to me that there would be little trouble in putting the lengths of your stories on the contents page as you did on the old OW. Why not? This would save me a lot of work since I figure it all out approximately anyhow for my private index of Palmer magazines.

Once more I ask you to start numbering your mag right on the spine, and then I leave.

Jack Hunter
454 Atrisco Dr. S. W.
Albuquerque, N. Mex.

You should have noticed by now that the contents page carries the issue number as (15-36). This means this is issue No. 15 since OW dropped dead in 1953, and issue 36, if you care to carry on the old numbering system. Our new distributor would be more than confused if we told him this was issue 36. He can only count 15. Wish he'd pay us for 36! Yes, we discovered Nuttall and Martin and Reese through our contest. Proved one thing—there is a lot of talent lying around and contests like this dig it out. Maybe we'll have another contest one of these days. . . .

If you think our stories are great—wait for each new issue as it comes out. We believe we've done it— obtained the stories needed to make SF great again. If

the stories we've got on tap don't do it—it can't be done! As for my own stories, like all the other authors, I hate to do shorties— they are tough to do, and I just ain't up to it. Okay on the length of the stories, it's in!—Rap.

Dear Bea:

I'm happy that a few changes have been wrought in OW. The colored COVERS are quite a surprize, even be they reprints. In comparing them with my back files, I've noticed more reds in both paintings this time, but nothing harmful to their beauty.

In the matter of interiors, there be some gripes to air. First off, why only one illo in the whole mag? And it illustrate's the Ed's story, at that. You'd think that "Narkeeta," with its length, or Bob Bloch's little epic would deserve the illuminating hand of such an artist as Chas. Hornstein; but no, you confine it to that miserable little thing by RAP.

I have nothing against a story by Palmer appearing in a Palmer mag, some of RAP's best has come to light this way. But, please Ray, not those atrocious short stories. Mr. Palmer does just fine in the novelette lengths, and novels were made for him, but the short hasn't enough room for one of his quasi-epics to develop. Looking for more "scienti-Palmer" in the future.

Liked most of the other stories especially "Where the Buffalo Roam," and "At the Bridge." Bloch has a story-telling bent that seems to make his lowest hack sit up and sparkle, and none of it was missing from "Buffalo."

George H. Smith's "At the Bridge" was mediocre, hackish, and had a slightly different flavor, characteristic of all his work, which made me like it, in spite of myself. I first read one of G. H. Smith's stories, when I mistakenly read the author's name as George O. Smith, a favorite of mine, whom I should like to see in OW.

Waiting for the Finlay *color* covers, G. O. S. and the Ed Hamilton sequel to "Starman." I remain. . .

John G. Trimble
2450 Easy Avenue
Long Beach 10, Calif.

Well, we get about 700 words per page. Now, even at a cent a word, this is $7.00. Let's say we get an illustration: it costs us about $25.00, and the cut costs $10.00. Five times as much for that same page. We are forced to economize right now (who isn't!), and when we're broke, we just can't buy. But if you read our November issue, you noted that we do buy when we can! And sooner or later, we'll be the best illustrated mag in the business —because if we aren't, we'll be OUT of business! We mean that. Either we make a huge success, or we hang up our shingle. Confidentally, we have a feeling, a bursting inside sensation, that keeps pushing the air out of our ears, that tells us we're going to make it. However, it may just be them durned deros of Shaver's filling our skull with hydrogen gas . . . Yes, I'm working on a novel for OW. Something I've wanted to do for years. You're right about my shorts being atrocious—Rap.

Ray:

Slow down a bit! You've begun a killing pace for yourself to follow. One that's slowly "killing" what readers you have left!

You are thinking too far into the future to suit this fan.

This second issue of the mag that flared up as O. W., waned to SS, then fluttered about as Universe and finally began to re-kindle itself as O. W. again was thrown together in utmost haste.

You apologize all over the place for this haste, accomplishing nothing more than to have a few more readers realize the startling change that has taken place in Ray Palmer in the last few years! The old RAP *never* had to apologize for anything!

The magazine you are now publishing is still UniverSciencStories! Not O. W. That mag began to die around issue no.

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You are reprinting (½ size yet) old O. W. covers, you've dragged the whatsonnabackovernow paintings out of their graves again, you've used *one* whole illo (a Hornstein UGH!), you are offering, of all things, assorted household appliances to those who can sell, palm off, get-rid-of, subs to O. W., you gush all over the place with ads taken from Mystic-mag, forthcoming Saucer books, and some guy who positively guarantees to turn my hair back to its original color! Why am I so damn peeved? It's because I like your mag Ray, but I don't like what's happening to it. In trying to appeal to "the masses" you are making many grave mistakes!

Have you bothered to re-read some old issues of O. W. lately? I refer to Nos. 1 through 20. THAT mag seemed to be so popular, wunner why? I was among the "masses" about the time I discovered SF and O. W., I never missed an issue, and drew from O. W. a working knowledge of fanzines, fans, and fandom. Besides this I enjoyed the stories immensely. Still I don't think that you had your golden age . . . . nosiree I too look forward to your "future" with great anticipation, but what about NOW, RAP? There are some of us who sub to your mag already, must we suffer under the yoke of a myriad of "in-between issues?"

So I'll wait two months till next ish, but what-ever-the hell you do—DON'T repeat this kind of issue agan! I'll be looking for some of those wunnerful things-to-come that you've been promising, in fact, I'll be expecting them. Will RAP reform? Will he leave his Mystic-mag long enough for one last fling at reaching the ionosphere with O. W.? Will the Golden Age come at last?

Maurice Lubin
14 Jones St.
Worcester 4, Mass.

The one thing that hits me about your letter is your (apparent) opinion of me. A long time ago, a couple of fans came to me with an idea for a cartoon strip. They called it Superman, and wanted me to do the script for it, while they did the drawing. I rejected the idea because I thought "such a character cannot maintain suspense, because he can do anything, therefore a problem cannot exist." How wrong can a guy be? Today I could be rich! Superman is the biggest thing ever, and will continue to be. Well, you seem to think I'm a superman too. You think it is just "natural" that I'll come up with a Golden Age of SF. You take it for granted, and beef a little because I hain't done it yet. Now listen, Maurice, it's not the editor— granted he instills a little personality — it's the writer. It's the stories that count. Nowadays the stories aren't being written — and it's because I (like a lot of others) made a misjudgment. We figured SF was growing up. We forgot the basics, and we turned down the "superman." Well, I know the basics. I've been in this business for 30 years. And I keep forgetting how basic it really is. In short, 30 years experience doesn't seem to mean a thing. What have I learned in that time? It seems how to do everything wrong. Well, a few months ago I got out of the saddle and invited a few authors into it. A lot of gall to ask them to ride such a scrawny horse, but they agreed to ride— if I'd just hold the reins gentle-like and not get too high-horsey. The result has been manuscripts. And believe me, it has been a pleasure to read them. For the first time in five years, I find myself reading science fiction with great glee and eating it up! Now, all I'm gonna do is pass it on to you—and if it doesn't effect you the same way, it will prove one thing—I don't know a good science fiction story when I see it, and the best thing I can do is go back and sit down! Really, though it gives me a queer feeling to get letters like yours (and I got dozens with exactly the same thing in them this month) and wonder how I ever got such a reputation? It's awful tough to try to

live up to it. I hope I make the grade!

Dear Rap:

A unit of your public finally got up the courage to tell you in detail just what he thinks of OTHER WORLDS, SCIENCE STORIES, UNIVERSE and MYSTIC. Others have described a general dissatisfaction but were too vague to be of any help in telling you just what they wanted. It was a sort of situation where "his best friends wouldn't tell him." I sat around like a coward hoping you would cut your head in with your feet and get back into stf without having to be pushed.

For the most part, what Jack Hunter wrote is complimentary, the phrases describing the virtues of past issues in particular. Part of his letter wasn't so complimentary. But as Mr. Hunter intended, his letter irritated you enough to make you justify yourself in your readers' eyes—not just Mr. Hunter's, but all readers.

Many of us knew some of the reasons you couldn't meet OTHER WORLDS former standards, but few of us knew all. Undoubtedly there are still a number of problems you felt it unnecessary to cite, but we are much better acquainted with the difficulties you've been laboring under. Those of us who know your past record; of your accomplishments in the field of science fiction, your discovery of writers and writers-who-became-editors; we're all for you.

You've asked some questions in your reply to Mr. Hunter's letter, and asked for straight answers. Here are mine: I do *not* carry a grudge against science fiction with mystic overtones. (In my personal opinion, the lines separating mysticism, fantasy and science fiction are too faint to show a difference in them.) If you can get Shaver to write his old wierdies, by all means, get it and I'll read every word. Revive the "mystery" if you want to; I'm no Shaver fan but the fiction was still worthwhile and very facinating reading. I don't give a damn if you plot Shaver's yarns or if he plots 'em, or Steinbeck—hell, *I'll* plot 'em if necessary. Put Rog Phillips and the other *real* stf writers to work on the kind of writing they like to do. You're going to find that they're still welcome to a lot of readers. All the veteran fans will come back for more (and I consider myself a veteran because I *did* get in on the tail end of the honest-to-God stf.)

Is there anything or anyone to prevent stf from staging a comeback?

You say stf declined. You don't hold that viewpoint alone. There are those who disagree. Still, stf *has* declined, despite the half-hearted efforts of readers and editors alike to prevent it.

Is there anything or anyone to prevent stf from staging a comeback?

You perpetuated a hoax on the public for how many years with the Shaver mystery? Who helped give the saucer myth a send-off? How many times have you kept the public's interest on science fiction with similar gimmicks (even though you had another purpose) before I began cutting my teeth on AMAZING? You still have imagination. You've still got enough spunk to engineer another hoax if you have to. Get mad, Ray. Go on a drunk if you have to, but get mad. Then get in there and show 'em how the cow ate the cabbage.

You can't revolutionize a field of fiction by yourself? Take a look at some of the trash masquerading as science fiction that's on the stands today. Then follow the advice you gave yourself and you'll be getting letters by the hundreds asking "What can I do?"

In the issue that contains stories by the old-time greats that were with you in the past; on the day I see stories by such authors as Richard Shaver, S. J. Byrne, Rog Phillips, E. E. Smith, and of course, the *real* Raymond Palmer; at that time I'll extend my subscription for five years and begin blackmailing every name in my black book to do the same.

And I'll continue to extend so long as the trend continues.

Undoubtedly there are others who joined the parade of science fiction because of its very DIFFERENCE; and with your work in AMAZING STORIES, you were partly responsible for that difference. Only a person with your abilities can replace the adventure story with a futuristic background for something worthy of the term "science fiction." Ray, you're at bat now. Slug us a homer! You've done it before so you-know it isn't impossible.

Jim White
7770½ Rosewood Avenue
Los Angeles 36, California

Jim, I've got that homer on my desk —but I've got to find a way to keep the umpire from calling at a foul! I've got the NEW Burroughs! 100,000 *words of the most wonderful stuff I've ever read! I read that manuscript over once a week, just for the pure pleasure! I'm going to memorize it, so I'll never forget it. So if it's never published at least it is a part of my memories of Tarzan and John Carter. I truly hope I can swing a publicity campaign which will force the issue. I need* 100,000 *Burroughs fans to back me. With that loud a shout, I can do it. But if a half-dozen of you fans give out with a half-hearted yelp, that's all this home run will ever be—a foul ball!*

However, if this ball goes nowhere, I've got a few more. They will be at least three-baggers. And by your old favorites too. After all, these men proved in the past how good they were. They are still good. Only thing is no editor was left in the field who wanted what they had. So, maybe even without Tarzan and John Carter, we can do it.

Hey, you! Don't you go calling the saucers a myth! No such thing. Yes, I did give it a send-off—I was responsible for keeping it alive when the powers that be had killed it dead. It cost me plenty! But if I ever get the chance again, I'll do the same. And I never engineered a hoax in my life. The Shaver business was no hoax. I still believe every word of it. I've just revived it (in a factual way, without any attempt at fiction) in MYSTIC and right now I'm wondering. Those deros just gotta be real! Otherwise, how explain . . . Jim, if those deros are real, I'm a big fool! I should keep my mouth shut. You know, Jim, when I first started that "hoax," things began to happen around the Palmer household.

A lot of them hurt. One of them nearly killed me. I guess it must have been a state of mind. Sorta like a paranoid. Couldn't have been anything else. Persecution complex. All that kind of thing. Things in my mind, like millions of lice that bit all my friends (Hamling, Browne, Rog Phillips, Bill McGivern, Frank Robinson). Boy what a hoax that was! I sure had fun! Only them darn deros are messing things up something frightful around here now. Like making me miss a deadline on OW (which accounts for this issue being Feb. instead of January. And for the cover plates being "lifted" by some sneak-thief (only there wasn't any thief). I intended the front cover of this magazine to be the back cover of July 1953 *OW. No, darn you, I won't bring back any Shaver mystery! But I will bring back Shaver, with some wonderful fiction. With no MYSTERY, I won't have no alibi for failure. Them deros are too easy to use to shuck responsibility! Right?—Rap.*

My dear Ray Palmer:

Your rambling, incoherent editorial seemed to intensify the summer heat of this tropical republic; but I tried to read it to the very end without bias, despite the bombastic gaucheries, the calculated air of intellectual confusion, and the sad fact that you have failed to get rid of the very sins of omission and commission which helped to decimate your competition.

There is a definite need for a fine,

adult science fiction magazine to compete with GALAXY and ASTOUNDING, particularly if you depart from their norm sufficiently to stress *adventure* where they (particularly the latter) stress technical details. But you must be prepared to match their excellence of characterization, their effort at fine writing, and decisively cultivate a genuine distaste for the infantilism which alienated so many of us from the AMAZING STORIES of what you call: "The Good Old Days!"

It may be that you still harbor a nostalgic predilection for the adolescent space opera; the hallowed cliches; the "blessed sleeps," and "tortured lungs," and "galloping indians," and arrgh! It may be that dear Bea Mahaffey with the intuition of a woman, knows it and accepts and edits the stories to conform with this anacronism imbedded in your subconscious. But the fact is that your July, 1955 issue, (No. 12,) (33) could have been published in toto during the early 1930's.

This letter is written out of the realization that too many of us shy away from an honest expression of opinion because: (a) we fear the usual repercussions from the howling pack of adolescent fans, and (b) because we have no faith in being able to change the status quo.

But hidden within your editorial, under the debris of bravado, there is a definite cry for help, and I for one, and many of my friends, would like to see your magazine succeed, and bring us many hours of pleasure and entertainment.

Perhaps you will accuse me of failing to be specific, but I happen to be an author myself, and it is not within my province to play critic.

However, if you want help, you will have to make a definite decision: Either you will edit OTHER WORLDS for fourteen and fifteen year olds, and conform to their mental level and leave us out, or you will publish an adult magazine and honestly take your chances with your successful predecessors. We are not interested in covers, or inside illustrations, or cute letters of the *"I've never written to a mag before in my life,"* variety. We are interested in stories which have a sound basis in science, without its being obtrusive; characterizations which are psychologically sound — in short, stories which have *something to say,* and say it in a professional manner.

Don't worry about rates, and whether you can get name authors, or not. They will come to you and help you over the hurdles if you are intellectually honest, and if the pages of OTHER WORLDS are worthwhile.

Albert de Pina, Ph. D
Hotel Nacional de Cuba
Havana

Now you've got me! Just for an example, as a writer, and as an adult, just how do you classify "The Gods Of Mars" by Edgar Rice Burroughs? Would you say that (if I published such a story) I was being adult, or was I catering to the fourteen and fifteen year olds? If you DO, then I will have to admit that I can never edit your kind of magazine—because I just wouldn't know what to do. To me, it seems that there is a balance. I have seen some stuff in what both of us would not deny are the "classics," which I'd enjoy just as much, and put it into OW. I've published some stuff by 9-year-olds which happened to strike me. I still remember a bit by a lad under ten who had his hero "spit the villain in the eye" at a thousand yards, and down him proper. It was the most beautiful, unconscious bit of satire I've ever seen, and I so labeled it—but so help me, a reader rating shoved it into FIRST PLACE IN THE ISSUE, and SERIOUSLY so. I sure was hitting the kids that day! With an adult piece! How do you tell!—Rap.

CLUB HOUSE was crowded out.

COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES!

How would you like to live a hundred years longer, with all the full powers of the prime of life? Something like that happened to James Canfield, only he didn't know if it was going to be a hundred years or a hundred days—it might be either, or anything in between! More like a sentence of death, than of life! What made things different, though, was the incredible role in which he found himself cast—as ANOTHER MAN. Your own life is something you're used to; but to be thrown into that extra hundred years as somebody else . . . and then to find that you've become the potential gateway for the entry into our universe of the greatest terror ever to menace human life! What was THE GORKEN? Human, or just . . . IT! And from what strange dimension? Did Canfield's added tenure of life come from the Gorken, or from YET ANOTHER FANTASTIC BEING! Here is a novel of tremendous SCIENTIFIC scope. Even a physicist or an engineer would approve of this one. In addition, here is ADVENTURE with all the stops pulled out! GREAT adventure. And here is a PLOT that will keep you on your toes, guessing. And what SUSPENSE! Don't miss this one! It's BIG, too! 87,500 words long!

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Ray Palmer, Amherst, Wisc.

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